

have i known you twenty seconds, or twenty years? by stardustupinlights

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Characters: Fudou Yuusei, Yuuki Juudai | Jaden Yuki

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Summary:

A love story told in firsts, which each chapter exploring a new one.

Relationships: Fudou Yuusei & Yuuki Juudai | Jaden Yuki, Fudou Yuusei/Yuuki Juudai | Jaden Yuki

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1. first meeting

Author's Note:

yes hello this is my first time writing and publishing anything that isn't datastormshipping for vrains so pls be kind to me i just love these bois. so much. they're so soft. they deserve love.

i have like 5k more words written for this with two other different scenarios and some other scenarios in mind. if you think of something Cute(trademark) don't be afraid to leave a comment along with your thoughts on this.

enjoy!!

Yusei is seventeen when he first meets Judai.

It's been a long night for him; competitive, secretive, illegal street racing isn't exactly easy or relaxing or *safe*, but he needs the cash, and he *finally* has enough of a reputation that people bet on him more often, which turns into higher earnings.

It wasn't what he planned to do when he returned to New Domino, but it is what it is. The races happen a couple hours outside of town, on dirt roads that are inconspicuously arranged for their bikes beforehand, and he's pretty sure the police knows about them but keep their mouth shut for the sake of quick cash and entertainment. The city is still healing, slowly but steadily trying to return to its former glory in what could be called record time, with just three ongoing years, but it feels very much like badlands out here, where there aren't as many traces of destruction but there also aren't construction workers and pavement machines all around the clock.

Yusei has only been here for a few hours, raced twice and won both times by a hair's breadth, which is getting him more stares than he'd like. He's been told to take a break, and was handed a cup filled with an alcoholic drink that he pushes into someone else's hand as he walks away from the show-runner, stepping away with his bike in order to make sure everything

will be ready for the next race, as well as to breathe some air that doesn't reek of cigarettes, beer, and dust.

He wouldn't say he hates the scene. He enjoys racing too much to care about the environment beyond it being safe *enough*, but it is annoying to get home, and have to set his clothes apart from the rest of his normal laundry so they don't make a big mess, to have to spend at least an hour polishing his bike, to wash the grime off his hair. He could try going the pro route, like Jack and Crow, but as much as he loves it it's not what he wants to do with his life. At least, he doesn't *think* so.

He'll figure it out by next year, it's what he tells himself, he'll figure it out after graduation. He doesn't want to go back to Den City yet. He doesn't want to forget the promises he's made to himself, to his family, to his friends, to Kiryu. So he needs to hang in there.

He doesn't notice he has company until the sound of feet shifting on dirt reaches his ears, so close he can see the dust rising up from where he's kneeling, checking that everything is alright with his wheels.

He looks up to see someone peeking over his bike, with wind-swept brown hair and matching brown eyes gazing curiously down at him. As their eyes meet, the stranger's face lights up with a friendly smile, and Yusei hesitates. No one around here is *friendly*, especially to him who has come and steadily knocked down their favorite riders down their high horses, so this person is either really drunk, really lost, or trying to fuck with him.

"Hello, there!" Mister Friendly says, straightening up as Yusei stands up. He's surprised to see they're about the same height, considering Mister Friendly looks older— and not nearly rough enough to be around these parts, but that doesn't seem to faze him, nor does the stare down Yusei gives him. "You got a cool ride!"

Yusei blinks. Definitely not a regular. "Thanks."

Clearly unaware of illegal street racing etiquette, Mister Friendly leans his hands on his bike in order to take a closer look at Yusei. He barely holds himself back from slapping them away, since it's clear he's just clueless. It's

not the first time people who think they're tough have stumbled into trouble around these parts.

Mister Friendly looks at him closely, as if measuring him up, eyes narrowing just-so for a second before something in his expression changes, his grin turning sharp, reminding Yusei of a mischievous fox. Suddenly, he wants to turn tail, since Mister Friendly gives off an odd aura— like he's not nearly as mundane as he looks, or like he can read Yusei really well. It's a little unnerving.

“Bit young to be racing, aren't ya?” He asks, and Yusei's eyes widen, glancing around them to make sure no one is listening, and crossing his arms as he looks back at him, glaring. “Oh, hey, relax—”

“I don't know what you're talking about,” Yusei scoffs, but Mister Friendly doesn't even flinch. If anything, his eyes are shining now, amused. But there's no real hostility in it, no real threat, and from this close up Yusei can smell a hint of alcohol on him. He might be actually drunk, or tipsy, but he doesn't seem to be looking for a fight. “Mind your *own* business.”

Mister Friendly tilts his head to the side and shrugs, that foxy grin still in place. “Sorry, I couldn't resist asking. You've been amazing tonight, but I'm sure you could be doing better things with your time.”

Yusei frowns, confused, his nose scrunching up. Is this guy coming on to him, or does he lack self-preservation? Not that he isn't good looking, in that simple yet eye-catching way, but... “Didn't I just tell you to mind your own business? You're lucky it's me; if you talked like this to any other racer they'd have already punched you.”

“Aww, I guess so,” Mister Friendly chuckles, shaking his head, staring at Yusei's face. “Sorry, I might be a little drunk. I didn't even want to come here tonight, but my contractor insisted. Stubborn man, really.”

Yusei squints, eyeing him up. “You aren't a bouncer or some type of body guard, are you?”

Mister Friendly bursts out laughing as if Yusei just cracked a joke, throwing his head back and no doubt attracting looks. Yusei can feel eyes on his back already, and it immediately makes him hunch his shoulders. He really doesn't want any trouble tonight. The last thing he needs is to get his bike messed with again.

"Nah, man," Mister Friendly says, still giggling. He's definitely drunk, indeed. "Not that I wouldn't be able to handle it, but it's not my type of gig. Name's Judai."

He extends his hand, offering a handshake, and Yusei goes to take it before realizing his gloves are absolutely covered in dust and dirt, but Judai takes it before he can think of taking them off, shamelessly shaking it and not even blinking at the dust clinging to his hand after he lets go, casually wiping it on his jacket. He doesn't even know *why* he accepted the handshake, but there's something about Judai that makes it really hard for Yusei to stay annoyed—and he also seems to be decent at conversation, managing to take Yusei's mind off the grime over his bike, the hours he'll spent cleaning up later, the bad company. He hasn't been this relaxed during a conversation in ages, even if it's not exactly a smooth one; Crow and Jack are too rowdy for it to feel quite this comfortable and casual sometimes, and they're too tired to bother with anything other than conversations through grunts as of late.

It must be that Judai likes people—he can't imagine it being any other way, since he did just come to chat up a stranger, *and* accused him of fooling the guys in charge of arranging the street races he's participating in into thinking he's over eighteen. He must be one of those that make people feel at ease just by being around. It's strange.

"Fudo Yusei," he ends up mumbling, and then realizes he probably should have kept his family name to himself, the way Judai did. He decides to not bring any attention to it, but Judai has already perked up with a gesture not unlike a dog's. "At least you have an excuse to be behaving like this..."

Judai either ignores that jab, or doesn't really care about following that line of thought. Yusei would have preferred he had, though, because his next words are *not* the ones he wants to hear at two a.m. on a race night.

“Ah, wait, you wouldn’t happen to be the Fudo Yusei that’s currently trying to get into Tenjoin Asuka’s summer engineering program, would you?” He asks, and Yusei’s expression must have given him away pretty badly, since his whole face lights up, a cheeky grin taking over it like the sun peeking from behind clouds. Yusei immediately misses the most subdued grin, and the foxy one, because being under the attention of this one is... *overwhelming*. “Oh, you are! Man, it’s such a small world. I’m Asuka’s friend and she’s always talking about her students—”

Judai cuts himself off, his face freezing, and Yusei sputters. “Does— does that mean I got in?”

“Eh, I wouldn’t know,” Judai says, glancing away from Yusei’s eyes as if realizing he fucked up. When he looks back, his cheerfulness is full force. Yusei almost feels the need to shield his face from it. “But I wish you the best of luck! To think you’re a street racer, too, that’s so cool...”

“Judai-san,” Yusei struggles to not twist his hands together, toying with his gloves. Judai seems quite shocked at the honorific after the rather casual way Yusei’s been talking to him, but he’s a bit too panicked to think about it too hard. “Please don’t tell Tenjoin-sensei about the street racing.”

Judai blinks at him, then slaps a hand down on Yusei’s shoulder, his smile widening and showing teeth. He’s stronger than he looks, so Yusei wobbles a bit out of surprise, but he’s more impressed with his face. Really, he just — how does he manage to have so many different smiles? It’s *insane*.

“Hey, don’t worry! I don’t kiss and tell, after all,” Judai winks, and heat unexpectedly makes his way to Yusei’s face. Something in Judai’s expression shifts, though, to something more serious, momentarily squeezing Yusei’s shoulder. “Now, word of advice, kid, since you seem like a good cookie— I’m guessing you’re into racing because of the money, and because you like it, but there’s nothing wrong with a retail job either. Try to keep that passion from misguiding your focus on school, yeah?”

“I...” Yusei starts, not really knowing what to say to that. It’s not that he hasn’t thought the same thing himself, but it’s a little wild to hear it from

someone he's known for maybe, if he's generous, fifteen minutes. "I... thank you?"

Judai slaps his shoulder again, and then lets go of it. Warmth lingers there, through Yusei's riding jacket and the shirt he has underneath, and it's a little distracting, in a nice way. When was the last time he just spoke to someone like this, without the weight of his life trying to crush him? Without being so exhausted by the late night racing he could barely process things? Maybe he should reconsider that offer to work as a mechanic he got, after all...

"No problem, speed racer," Judai finger guns at him and then sighs, looking around them with a self-satisfied smile. Yusei wonders if this is a thing he regularly does: walking up to strangers to give them unsolicited yet not entirely rude life advice. He sure seems like the type.

Someone calls Yusei's name from the crowd, and he recognizes the voice of the show-runner. He's up.

"I have to go," Yusei bites his lip. Despite the briefness of their conversation, he finds himself a little disappointed that he has to cut it short. Judai smiles kindly at him, his eyes soft around the edges, and Yusei finds himself opening his mouth again. "It was nice talking to you."

"Likewise," Judai nods, winking again. "I probably won't be sticking around for long. Maybe for one last race."

Yusei's called again, but he lingers. "Will you bet on me, at least?"

A short laugh, almost breathless in its suddenness, escapes from Judai's lips, and then he's giving him a two-finger salute, nodding towards the race track. "Absolutely, speed racer. Now, go knock 'em out."

Yusei nods, blinks, turns around and guides his bike to the starting line, keeping down a sigh. There's heat over his cheeks, trying to tell him something that he's really not ready for, neither emotionally nor subconsciously, but the second he straddles his bike, hands on the handles, he stops thinking.

After this race – which he won, this time by a rather large margin – Yusei is told to go home, that he did well, and is unexpectedly handed a bigger paycheck than he thought he would get tonight.

“Some guy bet an obscene amount on you and then left,” the show-runner tells him, when he, against his best judgment, asks. He seems almost annoyed by it, but disinterested all the same. “Didn’t even collect his due money, so I thought I’d settle for a fifty-fifty with you. Don’t make me regret it.”

Yusei has a stupid grin over his lips all the way back into New Domino, but it falls when he finally gets into bed at around four a.m., after an hour of cleaning up and getting some of the worst of the dust and dirt off his bike for him to clean tomorrow.

He forgot to ask for Judai’s number— *and* his last name.

Fuck.

2. second (first) meeting (or, alternatively, the friendship step)

Notes for the Chapter:

this update was Not Planned but i was blessed by this writing gods so do enjoy pls!

Tenjoin-sensei looks at Yusei as if he just told her that her cat died. "You broke your wrist?"

"I went late-night riding with a friend," Yusei glances down at said offender, wrapped safely in bandages and held up by a splint, feeling like she sounds: devastated. "Hit the brakes too soon during the last lap."

Tenjoin-sensei shakes her head and sighs, frowning, but after a second of thinking she offers Yusei that kind smile of hers, the one that makes people passing her in the hallways stare. "Well, this is nothing we can't work around. I'm glad you're alright and that it wasn't a big accident. Have you seen Bruno today...?"

Admittedly, most of the conversation passes him in a rush. He's doped up on painkillers and lack of sleep, because the late-night riding was more like racing Jack to the other side of town for six hours straight – under an excuse of 'practice' – when they were actually just fucking around, with fast food breaks in between. Crow had had none of it and gone to bed, like the responsible citizen he likes to pretend he is, and Yusei regrets not listening to him.

This was, of course, *after* Yusei was up studying for a presentation, that isn't due until next week, up until twelve a.m., because he's paranoid. Then the accident happened and he spent about two hours at the hospital, then another one at home, trying to look a little less like shit and get anything other than French fries in his stomach. He's tired. There's motor oil on his face, because he tried to change his bike's poked-through gas tank one-handed, until Crow noticed him and told him to either go to bed or fuck off to school, like the good friend he is.

He gets the gist of what Tenjoin-sensei says to him, at least, which is confirmation of an extension on his project's deadline, and Bruno supervising him while he works on it, so that Yusei doesn't cause more harm to himself—he would protest to that assumption, but he's been caught too many times accidentally skipping meals and working while sick with fevers and colds. It would be nice to be able to go to bed now, but he has classes in two hours. He might just find the shadow of a tree to sleep against and call it even.

Sometimes he regrets actually getting into college, and his decision to pursue a masters after he gets his degree in a few months. But then he remembers how he's not piss poor anymore, and how he doesn't have to do illegal racing, and the feeling passes.

Yusei glances down at his wrist again. He's going to hold this against Jack for *months*.

Too distracted by his general misery, Yusei doesn't notice someone is walking in his direction, as he steps out of the building where Tenjoin-sensei's office is in, and into the cobblestone path leading to the gardens, until they collide with such force that it almost makes him trip over his own feet, unprepared as he was. He looks up and does a double-take, wondering if the painkillers are *really* getting to him, but the hand that landed on his shoulder to help him straighten up squeezes it, and a smile as warm as sunshine fills his view.

"Well, look who it is!" Judai-san says, so loudly that if they weren't surrounded by miserable college students, someone would have probably noticed. Judai-san, as if he just walked out of Yusei's lingering fantasies of four years ago that he pretends he never had, looks him up and down, eyebrows rising. "Wow, you've gotten... um, big!"

Yusei blinks, eyebrows knitting together. "I'm confused."

Judai-san blinks back, tilting his head in mutual confusion, and then glances at his broken wrist, his eyes again, and clarity seems to fall over him. "Ah, I see. Fudo-kun, I'm not a hallucination."

"I find that hard to believe," Yusei shakes his head, trying to clear it a little, but Judai-san doesn't look *at all* like he remembers him and it's fucking with him. "Were you always this small?"

Judai-san opens his mouth, closes it, and stares at Yusei with what can only be called indignation. "I'm going to ignore you just said that."

Yusei nods. "That does sound like you."

At this, Judai-san smiles, eyes wrinkling in the corners, and he pats Yusei's shoulder before removing his hand. Much like four years ago, the warmth lingers, and it makes Yusei feel tingly. He had never picked up on this, but it was quite dark when they first met, so it feels like he's looking at his face for the first time again, under the sunlight. He wishes he had thought to wear his contacts or his glasses, because squinting at Judai-san probably doesn't make him look like less of a mess—or, less like he is *staring*.

"I also remember you fondly," Judai-san nods, as if to himself, and then brings up a hand to scratch his nose with a finger, the corner of his mouth rising up in a playful smile, not quite as sharp as the one Yusei remembers. "I was a little drunk, though. I thought you were innocent looking back then, but you have clearly... gotten over that, huh?"

Yusei thinks *really* hard. "Is that a compliment?"

Judai-san regards him with thoughtful eyes, and as a cloud passes and brings down sunshine on them, the light hits them, showing off the specks of gold among the brown, bringing out the green-ish stain in one of them, close to his pupil.

...they're really pretty.

"It's definitely a compliment," Judai-san announces, his lips pulling into a smile that's much thinner, less intense, no teeth. Subdued, grounded. It's just as nice as the other ones, feels a little more real than his sunshine-grins and his sly smirks. "I'm glad to see my advice stuck, though!"

Judai-san smacks his uninjured arm with his hand, light and friendly, as Yusei struggles to remember the advice he gave him, making a humming sound to pretend he isn't thinking that hard about it, and finally nods when the memory floods into his mind.

"It was good advice, though a little basic," Yusei blinks at Judai-san as he sputters in offense, squinting and scrunching up his nose. "Sorry, Judai-san, does the ground feel a little funny to you?"

A hand grabs his elbow, then, almost scaring him out of his skin, and Judai-san shoots him a thumbs up, even though he's shaking his head. He might actually just be pointing somewhere else, but Yusei can't tell. He's really tired. "You know what, I have to give a conference about my job for a bunch of culture studies nerds just over there. Why don't you step in and rest for a little bit, huh? You look dead on your feet."

"I wish," Yusei mumbles in agreement, referring to the '*dead on his feet*' thing, because college is like that, but Judai-san doesn't seem to notice—or, he ignores the woes of a doped up student. They're both fair choices. "Wait, you said a conference about your job?"

Yusei allows himself to be dragged into the building that's reserved for big speeches and professors who think they can give TED Talks, wondering if this counts as kidnapping. Judai-san seems too nice for that, though.

"Yep," Judai-san doesn't look at him, but he seems to be able to tell Yusei's staring. "Hey, I *know* I look like the epitome of a drop-out, which I am, but I know my shit."

Yusei doesn't doubt it, honestly, but he's a little distracted by the sight of Judai-san's arms, now that he's noticed them. He's stronger than he looks at first sight, and last time they met he was wearing a jacket, so the long-sleeve, skin-tight turtleneck he's wearing really shows off his lean build. He's nowhere near Yusei's bulk, or, god forbid, *Jack's*, but it fits him perfectly.

This is kinda gay, Yusei thinks, and then promptly buries the thought. He's too tired to examine *that* mess.

Yusei is led to the back of the second-biggest conference room in the building, which he's been in a couple times to watch Tenjoin-sensei's presentations, but Judai-san ignores just about everyone that flocks to him with questions along the lines of *where have you been, what took you so long, who is that*, as he guides Yusei to the VIP seats section and sits him there, making sure not to jostle him too much. His grip is steady and as warm as before, and it makes Yusei feel comforted. And a little sleepy. It's almost as if Judai-san's presence is like being hugged by a giant teddy bear. He likes it.

"Stay put, kid," Judai-san says, patting his cheek like he's a child, and leaves before Yusei can protest that he's *not* a kid. He knows now, after having studied under Tenjoin-sensei for several years, that Judai-san is unlikely to be more than six years older than him. Alas, he's gone, and Yusei nods off on the seat, forgetting about such things as classes, and projects, and how much Bruno will protest when he asks him for help with getting the scratches off his bike.

He comes back to awareness when the conference room starts filling with attendants, the buzzing of conversation waking him up, and it's not long before everyone is seated, the room packed to the brim, the lights dimming. He stares around in confusion for a bit, and then realizes that, oh, right, Judai-san is *giving* the conference, so Yusei makes himself a little more comfortable, adjusting his splint a little, before looking at the stage.

Judai-san was *not* kidding when he said he knew his shit. Yusei has no idea what the conference is about, because he's still mostly gone, his brain on vacation, but he picks up a few facts, despite it, because Judai-san is apparently an excellent public speaker.

Judai-san travels for a living. He does all kinds of things, from being a tourism guide, to writing tourism books, to uploading exploration videos and interviews, to reviewing restaurants and movie theaters and festivals around the world. He spends more time around the year out of Japan than in, because of how notable his name's become in the tourism world, and he's practically a walking guidebook on experiencing different cultures with an open mind. Yusei has the thought, halfway through the conference, that the university just wanted him to make this speech in order to encourage

student exchange programs and foreign research projects, or something like that, but he's far more distracted by something else.

Yusei isn't sure if he's imagining it, but Judai-san seems different, up on that stage. His posture is firm with confidence, his expression sharp with focus, his jokes and smiles far more calculated, his eyes less like a shining beacon and more like a smoldering heat, welcoming you in and drawing in question after question when he unexpectedly requests them. It's nothing short of fascinating, in a way, how aware he is of the power he holds over the room, and it makes Yusei wonder if he purposely plays himself down, in order to not choke people with the presence he holds once he gets going. He's clearly not the only one blown away by it, because everyone seems to be in different states of awe when he looks around, but Judai-san's voice and his energy keep him from looking at anything that isn't him for too long.

Yusei definitely misread the dose of painkillers he was supposed to take this morning, because fuck. He can't stop staring.

The details of the conference are fuzzy, but he's clapping by the end of it anyways, if for the way he could not look away. He thinks he hears someone crying, even, and decides he'll have to look this up on the university's site later, to fully grasp the information that he barely absorbed. Judai-san bows, a brilliant smile over his lips, and then Yusei watches, unmoving, how he comes down the stage and immediately launches into answering the questions of the students that approach him, all hands with great gestures and making people laugh.

It's a while before the room starts filling out and Judai-san stops being pulled into conversations and handshakes and even *pictures*, but when it happens, he heads right towards Yusei, his steps confident and entirely too smooth for Yusei not to be distracted by it, as if he's walking over clouds instead of wood. Yusei might be a little biased, now that he's seen him in his element, to think of him as an otherworldly being.

Or he's just high on painkillers. Hard to tell the difference.

Judai-san drops down on the seat next to him with a sigh, shooting Yusei a grin. "So—"

“So?” Yusei repeats, automatically, interrupting him without meaning to, and Judai-san’s smile turns foxy like it did four years ago. It’s amazing how much it screams trouble. Yusei blushes, scrambling over his tongue. “I, I mean—”

“Honestly, Fudo-kun, is this how you treat your seniors?” Judai-san shakes his head, clicking his tongue and crossing his arms. Yusei does *not* stare at them. He doesn’t. “Asuka has clearly done nothing for your manners. How disappointing. I’ll have to take it into my own hands and give you a lesson —”

Despite knowing he’s kidding, Yusei can’t help but bite back, his voice meek. “Well, maybe if you behaved a little more like a senior, Judai-san...”

“Oi!” Judai-san laughs, his eyes widening. Playfully, he nudges Yusei’s arm with his elbow over the armrest, shaking his head. Words leave his lips like a waterfall. “Unbelievable! How shameful! I just wanted to know your opinion on my performance, and this is how you treat me. Next time you’re too doped with painkillers, don’t count on me to take you to, like, a nice, comfy VIP seat, where you can see the whole thing without students tripping over each other to record it, and also don’t tell Asuka I said that about her or she’ll—”

“I think you were amazing, Judai-san,” Yusei says, his voice soft, this time interrupting him on purpose. It manages to stop his tongue, arms frozen in a half a gesture, brown eyes looking at him with a curious spark. “You really... you have a lot of stage presence. I liked it. You look different up there.”

Something behind Judai-san’s eyes softens, and it reminds Yusei of warm coffee in the mornings, the awful, instant kind, that he and Crow drink because they can’t be bothered with Jack’s fancy beverages that take way too long to prepare and Yusei secretly likes, but instead of being bitter, they’re sweet with the reassurance that comes from eating chocolate in front of a campfire, under a starry sky.

It’s odd, how Judai-san’s presence fills him with a sense of rightness— this is the second time they’ve spoken, yet it feels as if they just picked up their

conversation from that night. Maybe it's just Yusei liking that little chaotic spark that dances in Judai-san's eyes when he laughs, since it's so upbeat, and he hasn't really met anyone with the same kind of energy that Judai-san radiates just by *breathing*, but he doesn't want to question it too much.

He won't forget to ask for his number this time.

"You're too sweet," Judai-san says, cheeks pinking, staring at Yusei as if he can read his thoughts. Honestly, he wouldn't be surprised. Judai-san strikes him as the type to be just about anything he feels like being. "You know you're not too bad yourself, kid, you're *pretty*— uh! You know, like, you have a really honest, um, *je ne sais quoi*—"

Yusei tilts his head, watching Judai-san scramble to make his tongue work. It's a little jarring, the contrast between the man he saw on stage and the one talking to him. A little thought slips into Yusei's mind, telling him he'd like to find where those two sides meet, but he pushes it away. That's too deep for his tired, fucked up mind to deal with right now.

"I'm not a kid, though," Yusei smiles, slow and easy. Judai-san's jaw drops a little open, his words coming to a halt, though Yusei can't tell why. "You can't be that much older than me, even if you've been travelling for so long."

Judai-san snaps his jaw shut, but he's nodding, taking a deep breath, staring at Yusei as if he's just had a revelation. He sounds far away when he speaks. "I'm twenty-six, yeah— but you were so young when we met. You looked a little like a lost puppy, trying to not stand out. Innocent, but not really."

Yusei hums, but doesn't say he's twenty-one and as such that he's changed, because he's sure that Judai-san knows— Tenjoin-sensei had liked to bring up Yusei's young age quite a bit when he first got into contact with her and became her star student, and Judai-san clearly knew he got in back then. He seems clever enough to know that four years can change someone a lot.

Instead of that, then, Yusei allows himself to frown, his mouth naturally forming a pout, trying to be playful. He's never been that good at it. "Does

this mean I can't have your contact yet, Judai-san? Am I too much of a stranger, still?"

Judai-san makes a noise like he almost choked on his own tongue, coughing into his fist, so Yusei reluctantly pats his back. Yeah, this is usually the reaction he gets when he does this. He doesn't understand why.

"I, I mean..." Judai-san wheezes out, fist covering his mouth, neglecting eye contact. His face is red now, which makes Yusei worry that he's not getting enough air in that turtleneck. It is pretty tight. "I mean, if you want, you can have my number— er, *numbers*. I travel a lot, as you know, so W-Fi isn't always guaranteed. Nor is my physical company."

He seems a little embarrassed over this last bit, like he's previously ran into trouble with people because of that, but Yusei doesn't mind it, and says as much. "You seem like you'd have a lot of things to say over a phone, though— actually, you seem full of stories. I wouldn't mind that, and it's not like you're never in New Domino, right?"

Rubbing the back of his head with a hand, Judai-san looks at Yusei, eyes shining like he found a rare jewel. It makes his face heat up.

"That I do, I guess. Bad luck travels everywhere with me," a cheeky grin gets quickly replaced with that foxy smirk, then Judai-san pulls a pen from his pocket, grabbing Yusei's forearm, the one that isn't attached to his broken wrist, before he can react, his grip over his skin steady and strong and warm and not making him want to fight this at all. "Can't guarantee you won't catch it around me."

Yusei stares as Judai-san starts writing digits over his skin, barely feeling the pen. He can hardly believe he's letting him do this; if it were anyone else, he would have called them out on asking for permission, but Judai-san? Somehow, he doesn't mind it. He can't tell if that's good or bad.

"I'm willing to take the risk," Yusei says, to which Judai-san chuckles. He keeps writing. "Hey, hold on, how many numbers do you have?"

"Just enough."

Turns out that means *four*, and only one of them works in Japan. Yusei's forearm is now a mess of numbers, and something that looks like Judai-san's full name, if he squints, sits on top of them, recognizing the kanji even though the handwriting is atrocious. A little doodle of a star sits right next to it, which Yusei has to resist rolling his eyes at, even if it's cute. Being far more civilized, he kindly asks for Judai-san's phone, and registers his own, only-one-in-existence number, in it.

"Alright, speed racer," Judai-san stands up, patting his shoulder. "I gotta go. I need to be in America by tomorrow, and my flight leaves in a couple hours."

"Oh," Yusei blinks. He doesn't even know what time it is. *Oh, shit*, did he skip class? There's no way. He doesn't think the conference was that long. "I should probably, uh. Go, as well."

Judai-san tilts his head and looks down at Yusei, considering him. After a second, he surprises him with that same subdued smile from before, the one that makes his eyes soften, that looks real, tangible.

"Go home, Fudo-kun," he pats his shoulder again, his eyes lingering on Yusei's. "You're too smashed. I hope to hear from you soon."

And, just like that, he's gone, with Yusei's left to stare at his retreating back, feeling like there's just about a million words on the tip of his tongue and none of them succeed in escaping him. A feeling is brewing under his skin, soft and warm, and it makes him sigh out loud, to himself, the conference room empty.

Yusei goes home after having a quick talk with his professors about being too tired to make it to class, which they don't mind as long as he catches up fast, and spends about ten minutes carefully typing down all of Judai-san's numbers into his phone. Without thinking much about it, and not even falling to Crow's teasing remarks, Yusei takes a picture of the horrible-looking kanji at the top of the list and the little star. It's the first thing he texts Judai-san, nothing else for context, and the response is immediate.

'MY HANDWRITING IS FINE!'

Yusei sleeps like a baby well into the night, the smile not slipping off his lips even after he wakes up.

He's looking forwards to this—whatever it's meant to be.

Notes for the Chapter:

i almost died of sweetness writing this but i accept my fate. hope you enjoyed! <3

3. that one time yusei went into judai's social media and realized he's an influencer on the side (ish).

Notes for the Chapter:

no i don't know either

Yusei's known Yuki Judai for maybe three months, and he's nothing short of fascinated, in what he hopes it's not a weird way. Judai-san just... has so much to say, all the way from casual conversations that sometimes seem to spiral for hours into depths Yusei was no aware you could get to through texting, to bizarre stories about his job, to his rather sound opinions, and his ability to keep up an argument without getting defensive or aggressive about it like Jack and Crow do when they're bickering with each other. He's a seemingly infinite source of new knowledge, and Yusei's always liked learning things, so they've come together like moths to flame, falling like puzzle pieces in a dynamic not unlike they're actually known each other for years, despite Yusei's occasionally poking anxiety and distrust around new people. Judai-san is just comfortable, in every meaning of the word, erasing most of Yusei's second-thoughts with just a look, allowing him to get to know him deeply in such a short time. Yusei's never been an open book, exactly, but Judai-san reads him just fine, and satisfies his curiosity in return.

Yet, there's something that Yusei's been... intrigued about, that he hasn't been daring enough to bring it up to Judai-san. As they spoke more and more, almost every day for a couple hours, seemingly never having enough of the other, Yusei came to learn that Judai-san does a whole lot for work, more than he actually speaks about publicly, more than he made it sound during that seminar he gave. There's the weeks if not *months* he spends working with charities, traveling from country to country, but sometimes he leads some of the efforts to a cause himself, which according to him, is something he likes to keep under wraps, for the sake of the actual charity work getting press instead. There's the consulting he does for travel agencies about tourism routes, for the Manjoume Group, for *Kaiba*

Corporation, about locations where they could realistically expand the companies to. And there's the writing.

For someone who has such an awful, incredibly messy handwriting, to the point where Yusei can only read his kanji out of familiarity and context, there's probably not a second in the day where Judai isn't writing reviews or general overviews of the places he's in, taking notes in his brain, or his phone, or a notepad, or a *napkin*, with an accuracy to remember them if he loses them that seems to be absent in any other area of his life. Judai-san has officially written three books, but he confessed to having ghost written, in part, several others, though he refused to tell Yusei exactly how many. Out of curiosity, Yusei asked him to tell him some of the titles of the books he's ghost written, since he already read his three travel-related books, and he went through at least three stages of shock when he realized they were mostly fiction. It made sense why, after he started reading— Judai knows so much about other places and cultures, has so much creativity and life experiences, that it probably came easily to him, to take a manuscript with good ideas but very little skill, adapt to what his publisher wanted and what the main story beats were supposed to be, and write it out.

He doesn't write as often as he used to, or at least so he told Yusei, because of other work taking priority over his life, leaving him with very little time to dedicate himself to it. This is all on top of the investing he does, though he admitted that's mainly his friend in the Manjoume Group managing his funds for him, since he doesn't actually know how that works, but this is only a part of what's made Yusei so entranced with Judai-san's work. His personality is the rest of it, really, but despite all that Yusei knows *now*, there's still that little thing that nudges at him, when he remembers just how much Judai-san is doing.

Yuki Judai is quite the Google search online. Articles upon articles that mention his name practically bleed from the web, and Yusei would know, because he spent the first two weeks after getting his number researching him online, for seemingly no reason other than he couldn't not do it. There's only one stone Yusei left unturned.

Judai-san has a YouTube channel, and several social media accounts. Yusei doesn't know much about social media, other than it's scary and full of

people trying to one up each other for no reason at all, so he gave those a wide berth when he was researching Judai-san. He's curious now simply because Aki shared a link to Judai-san's Instagram, empathizing how pretty all his pictures were, and, well. Yusei could not resist the rabbit hole, after a short scrolling during class when he should have been paying attention, so here he is now, on his bed, staring at his phone's screen, Akiza sitting beside him, waiting for him to finish gathering his bearings and look up Judai-san's account with his newly created Instagram profile.

"Yusei, please," Aki sighs, not for the first time, leaning her chin on her knees. She would have probably tried to tear her hair out by now, if Yusei had been Jack. "It won't bite. Just do it."

"I feel like this will be invading his privacy, though," Yusei looks at her, frowning. He's more nervous that he lets on, of course, but Aki's stink eye indicates that she sees right through his bullshit. "Aren't you supposed to ask about this beforehand?"

"Yusei," Aki rolls her eyes very intensely, looking as if she might actually choke him. "The man has four million followers, including the Kaiba brothers, their company, *and* all of the Manjoume. Even Edo Phoenix follows him, for some reason! Why would an athlete follow him? You're more than fine in giving him a free follow, and he won't even *notice*."

Sometimes, Yusei misses when Aki was shy around him. She didn't chew him out so badly back then, but he guesses that's what dating Sherry does to you: gives you confidence and takes away all your capability to take any shit. Not that Aki ever let people fuck her over before, but she's only flourished. He's rather proud of her for opening up, even if it means being teased to hell and back, sometimes.

"Fine," Yusei mumbles, and finally types Judai-san's name in the search bar. Once he has his profile open, he hesitates one last time on the follow button, making Aki shove at his shoulder in encouragement— and badly hidden frustration. "I don't see why I had to create an account. I could just use your phone."

“You need something to do other than work, study, and tune your bike,” Aki shrugs, gesturing towards his phone. “Mindlessly scrolling for a few minutes won’t do you any harm. And, you get access to all the animal videos you want, if you follow the right accounts. Pandas, Yusei. *Pandas and cats*.”

Yusei has a feeling Aki is dumbing this down for him, keeping the scary bits out, so he doesn’t just delete the account after today. “I guess I wouldn’t mind pandas and cats.”

“And your boyfriend’s selfies, of course.”

Yusei shoots a glare at her, willing himself not to blush. He doesn’t think it works. “Aki, Judai-san is *not*—”

“—he is just as obsessed with you as you’re with him,” Aki takes Yusei’s phone from his hands, tapping the follow button, and starts scrolling down, stopping on a picture showcasing Judai-san smiling at the camera, hair windswept, a sunset behind him giving him a light halo. She pushes Yusei’s face away, her whole arm stretching, in an attempt to keep him off her. He could overpower her easily, but that’s not very nice, and she has a mean hook. “And with reason, too. You’re both really cute, but from the few times I’ve talked to him, he’s clearly very experienced, so Yusei, you better make sure to take it slow, or he might eat you—”

“Aki!” Yusei hisses, and Aki finally gives him his phone back, giggling, ruffling his hair with her other hand. “You shouldn’t say things like that. Judai-san and I are *friends*.”

“For now. Crow’s running a bet, and you better make me win, Yusei.” His mouth falling open in admittedly dramatic betrayal, Aki giggles again, playfully shoving at his shoulder once more. “Relax. I’m just messing with you.”

“Everyone is messing with me, for no reason,” Yusei sighs, and ignores how patronizing Aki’s sympathetic expression is. What has he done to deserve this? “Whatever. What am I supposed to do now?”

Aki hums, looking at Judai-san's grinning face on his screen. "Well, you scroll, and you tap the heart if you see something you like. That's it."

Yusei glances at his screen and bites his bottom lip, keeping down a pout. "What if I like everything?"

Aki bursts out laughing, and promptly decides it's time for her to leave, making up excuses about a date with Sherry as if they both don't know she's in Europe, mercilessly dropping a kiss on Yusei's forehead to contrast her smug expression. She's really as cruel as a rose.

"Oh, right, I forgot!" Aki snaps, stopping under the threshold of Yusei's bedroom door. "Don't look up his Twitter! You're not ready for that!"

She leaves before Yusei can ask why, which doesn't sit right with him, but then again, none of this does. Swallowing, Yusei stares at his phone, wondering about the connotations of this. Sure, Judai-san has a public image, part of him is open for literally the whole world to see, but it just doesn't seem right to Yusei to stalk it like this. It's not like he *needs* it, since he doubts that Judai-san is any different on social media than in person. Maybe more professional, since it is a platform that probably elevates his name recognition, but little else.

Yusei's just— he's curious. He looks at Judai-san's smiling face on his screen and sighs, wondering if Judai-san would actually mind him going through a few pictures, and he can already imagine him rolling his eyes and pointing out the same thing Aki did: he doesn't mind four million strangers, so why would it be different if it's Yusei, someone he knows and apparently likes?

Yusei groans at his helpless, probably unnecessary overthinking, laying down on his bed, and decides to say fuck it, liking the picture Aki left on screen and scrolling back up to start from the top, determined to just... be casual about it. It doesn't have to be a big deal, so he has to stop making it one. It's cool. He's cool. He asks for milk at bars and rides a bike. Judai-san's pointed it out several times, so it must be true.

Judai-san does have a lot of beautiful pictures. Most of his feed seems to be photos of places and food, perhaps people dressed up in what appear to be cultural outfits during parades or festivals, and each one of them catches Yusei's eye, because of the sheer diversity of backgrounds, colors, scenery, ambience. It's obvious Judai-san has an eye for it, too, and that loves taking the pictures, the care into the angle and lighting giving it away even for Yusei, who doesn't really know much about photography or anything of the like. It's just... nice. Aki did mention that scrolling through his profile was very aesthetically pleasing, and he has to agree. Yusei knows Judai-san speaks a lot of languages fluently, since he's seen a few of his interview videos online, and it really shows in the captions of each picture, almost all of them offering a translation under the '*read more*' into other languages, keeping it accessible.

It's evident, after a while, that Judai-san also just... has a *lot* of uploaded pictures. Yusei happens to glance at the date about an hour or two into his scrolling and realizes he's only gotten so far as two years back from now, which is considerable, because he's been scrolling like a possessed man, liking almost every picture on sight. He starts pausing only when he comes across pictures of people, instead of places, that seem more personal than those taken at strangers.

Tenjoin-sensei is in several pictures, as is a man that Yusei recognizes as the youngest of the Manjoume Group's CEOs. The rest, Yusei has mostly no idea who they are by name, even if he thinks he might have seen their faces in the news before, as if almost every close friend of Judai-san's are more than just normal people. He guesses that adds up; Judai-san attended the now revamped Domino Academy, which is still one of the most renowned schools in the city, its students usually heading onto big universities or shining careers, and while he claimed to be a drop out, Judai-san most definitely fell under the *remarkable* of their graduates.

At some point, though, Yusei starts seeing a much larger amount of pictures of one person only. A handsome foreign man, probably European, with teal colored-hair and kind eyes, continuously framed in ways Yusei could only call intimate, with close ups of his face, or him being the centerpiece. It doesn't take Yusei much thinking to put two and two together, especially

when Judai-san finally appears in one of the pictures, a selfie in which he's laying down in bed and the man is clinging to his chest, laughing about something.

It gives him pause, if only because, when he scrolls a few pictures up, all presence of him disappears, unless it's group pictures, and Judai-san is rarely standing next to him in them. The more intimate pictures are from anywhere from four to eight years ago, and while they aren't continuous, they're very present, up until they aren't. It makes Yusei feel a little dirty, watching this— this is Judai-san's past, and while the pictures are certainly all there for everyone to see, it doesn't take away the fact that, long ago, these were probably precious, sacred moments, captured without knowledge of the future. As someone that knows Judai-san, learning about what seems to have been a long relationship now gone through his social media feels like cheating at a game he's already the champion of.

Yusei might not say it out loud, but he does have a tiny, itty bitty crush. He's been dealing with it as well as he can, knowing Judai-san is probably not interested, considering he's so much more than Yusei will probably ever be, but it doesn't keep him from appreciating his friendship, his warmth. He doesn't really want to learn things about him just because it's written and framed all over his Instagram; he would rather get to know him himself, the way he's been doing up until now, that Judai-san shows him this himself, somehow.

Confident in that, Yusei goes to close the app, but ends up almost dropping his phone on his face. When he straightens it up, he finds that he's liked one of those old pictures, but he shrugs it off and exits out of the app, sitting up and stretching. He doesn't really have anything to do today; he makes it a habit to have study sessions with Aki in the morning, because he usually has to head to work during afternoons on weekends, but the shop is closed down for today, and he's already up to speed with any university assignments.

He could knock on Jack's door, see if he wants to head out and do *something*, maybe a ride that won't end up with him getting his wrist fucked up again, but he's probably still grumpy about Crow giving him a piece of

his mind in regards to finding a job today, and he doesn't want to deal with his pissy temper until dinner, at least.

He should nap. He doesn't get much sleep at night, too restless and haunted, but even on free, relaxing days like these, he struggles to fall asleep. It probably isn't worth it, since his sleep schedule will get messed up—

His phone rings. Yusei stares at it blankly, and then reaches for it where he left it on the bed, his mouth going dry when he realizes Judai-san is the one video-calling him. He licks his lips, hesitating, and answers before he can start overthinking it, not wanting to leave Judai-san hanging.

Yusei is greeted by darkness for a few seconds, and then a light source comes on and illuminates Judai-san's sleepy face, his eyes squinted at the screen as they adjust to the light, a blanket up to his chin making it obvious he's in bed.

"Yusei," Judai-san says, smiling warmly even as he blinks his eyes, in order to dispel the shock of light, and his voice is rougher than usual, dry. It almost makes Yusei melt in a way that is most certainly not friendly. "How's it going?"

"Judai-san, shouldn't you be sleeping?" Yusei looks at the hour at the top of his screen, tilting his head. "Not that I don't welcome the call, but isn't it three a.m. over there?"

Judai-san rolls his eyes, chuckling. "I couldn't sleep, so I decided to kill time by seeing if there was anything of interest online, particularly in Instagram—you won't *believe* what I found."

Yusei's heart sinks all the way to his stomach, knowing exactly where this is going, judging by Judai-san's mischievous grin. "Um."

"Yusei-kun, pray tell, were you stalking me?" Judai-san asks, adding a flare to it by dramatically widening his eyes, raising his eyebrows. "*The* Fudo Yusei, who barely uses his phone, liking almost half of my pictures in one sitting?"

Yusei didn't realize it was that many. "I... thought you'd have notifications off..."

"I do, but it's hard to ignore it when your activity tab is just one familiar looking username," Judai-san giggles to himself, sighing. "Yusei, you don't even have a profile picture— you should have committed to it and made a stan account. You could even join my fanclub!"

Cheeks flaming, Yusei lays back down on his bed, unable to look at Judai-san, his eyes drifting to the folded blanket beside his pillow. "Did you call just to torment me?"

Judai-san laughs louder than someone who looks as sleepy as he does should be able to, shaking his head. "Well, I couldn't resist teasing you. It's hard to imagine a guy like you going on a social media hunt like this."

"I wasn't trying to stalk you," Yusei bites his lip, resisting the urge to nervously scratch the back of his neck. "You're not offended, are you?"

"Offended? Dude, strangers do this shit on a daily basis. I get free nudes every week— not that I open them. I just know when I see an attached file," Judai-san laughs, as if that isn't the most terrifying, uncomfortable thing Yusei's ever heard. "I could close my DMs, but I get some hilarious shit sometimes. Worth the trauma."

"You're insane," Yusei concludes, to which Judai-san laughs again. Suddenly, his face blurs, and the screen goes dark— Judai-san just dropped his phone on his face, and the snort escapes Yusei before he can help it, a tiny smile pulling at his lips. "Ah, you okay?"

"Don't laugh! It's like fucking there a.m here, you said so yourself!" Comes Judai-san's muffled voice, the screen still dark. "Fuck, that hurt!"

Yusei starts laughing, quietly, but he chokes on it when the screen lights up and he's greeted by Judai-san, with full on bed hair, sitting on the edge of his bed without a shirt, the lamp lighting up every detail. Yusei's face heats up without him asking for it, and he curses Aki for riling him up before leaving, as if she's somehow at blame for Yusei's weakness.

Judai-san, not one for letting things slide as proved by this call, notices and smirks, winking at Yusei and raising his arm to show off more of his body. "See something you like, Yusei-kun? I have plenty of shirtless selfies, I noticed you didn't like those—"

Yusei is very deep in denial sometimes, so he just hums and does what any adult would do under a pressured situation— he hangs up.

He gets a text message not a full minute later: '*can I follow back?*'

Thinking back at what he saw, at who Judai-san is, at how his fans will most certainly find Yusei's account, he decides that Aki was wrong. You *are* meant to ask about this.

It's easy to say yes.

Notes for the Chapter:

listen i just wanted a funny bit askdfasldf

4. first sleepover (aka, pining)

Notes for the Chapter:

im soft. i should have probably done a chapter between this and the last one but i couldn't Resist. enjoy the sweet.

Judai's obsessed.

He's been trying to deny it for at least three months now, but there's no hiding it now, as he steps out of the airport and fishes for a taxi, in order to head to Yusei's place. It's a bad, bad, *bad* idea, one of the worst he's had in a while, and he has no clue as to why he's not trying harder to stop himself from going through with it— other than being an absolute moron, that is, but there's no surprise there. Judai looks around him at the innocent bystanders waiting for taxis, jealous of their much more peaceful energies, and takes a deep, deep breath.

He's obsessed with one Fudo Yusei, who has eyes entirely too soft for someone that's gone through what he has, and a smile *too* kind for Judai, who most definitely isn't pure enough to deserve it. Judai's used to being around smart people, alright. He's used to having the lowest IQ in the room, and he's fine with it, but even this is too stupid for him. He should have said no and just called literally *anyone else* that lives in New Domino, since he has plenty of friends in town, but nope. Yusei offered, and here Judai is, after having been unable to say no.

Fuck, he's a mess. He doesn't know how he'll make it through the night. Perhaps he should bite the bullet and get his own place, so he can avoid these situations, but he cringes just thinking about how much of a hassle it would be to have to pick up his own mail, instead of having Jun scream at him about it over the phone. And, well, there's the finding a landlord that will let him not actually live there, and stuff. Dreadful shit, really. He's happy with couches and hotel rooms.

But he couldn't say no to Yusei. He tells himself it's just because he was going through a weak moment, that it was late where he was and he was

jetlagged – even though he was away for almost *a month* – and that Yusei's voice was too soft and his offer too nice to ignore... but that's a lie, because in his heart he knows he just wants this. That perhaps he's even looking forward to this, like the hopeless idiot he is. Hell, like the *crib robber* he is, not that Yusei is significantly younger than him or anything, but he was *really drunk* when they met and he might have flirted a little bit, because he was *cute* and Judai was butt hurt over Johan saying some shit he can't even recall anymore, and Yusei has a radiant type of energy that really caught his eye. Somehow it hasn't changed one bit since, nor has it been marred by any of his life experiences in a way that doesn't signify maturity, so unlike the way Judai's grown, and it's really beautiful—

Well, there's not much point to regretting it now, is it? He's found a taxi and he's already given the driver Yusei's address. Goodness, *Yusei's* address, his awful part-garage, part-workshop, and part-man cave he already shares with *two* other people. Do they even have a guest room? Is their couch big enough? Judai doesn't mind having his feet hanging off the edge, not at all, he's slept under bridges, but the list of reasons why he should have said no just keeps on growing and growing.

Why is Yusei so fucking gorgeous and wonderful and shit? He couldn't have been normal, could he? Judai thinks to himself, looking out the window with a frown, as if any of that is the only reason he's obsessed with Yusei. As if being around him isn't the most relaxing yet heart stopping experience of his life thus far, and Judai's jumped off planes. He's pretty sure the driver can feel his sour mood, his spine tingly with the feeling of his thoughts being directed at him, but Judai's too busy panicking to bother telling him to stop judging him and watch the road.

He fucked up. Oh, he fucked up so badly. How is he going to even face Yusei like this? How is he going to hold back from spilling his guts? How is he going to not make it awkward? How is he not going to stare? Yusei has a gorgeous face, and Judai is expected to *think* while looking at it?

The car stops, and his driver looks at Judai with a raised eyebrow. He's so panicked he can't even say thank you as he pays him what's due and steps out, and he stands outside of Yusei's building for what he thinks are a few minutes but might actually be a few seconds, hyping himself up for this. It's

fine. It's totally cool. He's cool. It's only *Yusei*, there's no reason for him to make it weird because of *feelings*. Yusei's cool. He has a *bike*. And a new riding suit that made him trip over his own feet, when he first saw him wearing it last month during a friendly visit. Code word friendly. Yep. It's cool.

Judai walks up the stairs to the front door, avoiding the garage. He can't handle the sight of Yusei working on his bike right now, if he even is. He'd die. He's going to have a good time with him, catch up on what he's been doing, how school is going, how work is going, whether he's gone on any date or if he's seeing anyone— *or* maybe Judai will say nothing at all and just go to bed, that sounds like a sound alternative too, yeah.

They have no doorbell, which is an indication of how shitty this place can get and also means Judai has to *knock*. Like that's not the most awkward thing, because what if they don't hear him knocking and he just stands outside forever? What if he knocks out of rhythm and everyone judges him for it? What if the door just *falls apart*, because this place is really on its last leg and Judai's luck likes to play pranks on him?

He's overthinking. He's *aware* he's overthinking, but he can't stop, which just makes everything worse. He has not overthought things this badly since he was a *teenager*. Or since he and Johan broke up, like, *for good*, and Judai questioned his whole fucking life because *surely*, there isn't anyone willing to let him satisfy his infinite wanderlust if perfect Johan Andersen can't—

Whatever, that was years ago. He and Johan are cool now. It doesn't matter. *Yusei* matters, though, and if that isn't a terrifying thought, well. Judai will eat his own *hair*.

Finally, he knocks. The walls aren't *that* thin, but the door sure is, so Judai can hear someone scrambling to their feet, stubbing their toe and cursing out loud, and then hurrying up to open the door— he can tell it's Yusei, that tingly feeling running down his spine again, but Yusei's whole... *being* is far more welcome than his taxi driver to think this loudly about him.

Within seconds, the door opens, and Judai almost sags with relief when he meets Yusei's sparkly, purple-blue eyes. Yeah, he's obsessed. Hopeless. He

might as well give up and enjoy it before he inevitably ruins this, like he's ruined hundreds of things and relationships, but he's too afraid to risk being a step ahead just to screw it up anyways, like a cycle of helpless panic and pining. Has he ever longed this hard to kiss someone's mouth shut? He doesn't think so.

Whatever, he's thinking too much.

"*Hey*," the sound escapes from Judai's lips unwarranted, dragged out with a sigh in such a way that, to his ears, gives away exactly how much he's missed that light, shining presence of Yusei's reaching out to him. He's not even conscious of the smile taking over his lips. "Long time no see, huh?"

Yusei nods, staring at him with wide eyes, that humble, close-lipped smile of his slowly taking over his whole face, lighting up his expression. A funny something that Judai never names, much like the tingly spine feeling but sharper, is coming off Yusei in waves, telling him he's missed him just as much as Judai's missed him, and that's— well, that's a *lot*, so Judai will probably have to shut that funny thing up tonight. He's not into invading people's privacy like that, much less so *Yusei's*. Unless he wants him to invade it, that's it.

God, he's incorrigible.

"Judai-san," Yusei breathes out, blinking down at him like he can't believe he actually came. Honestly, if he only knew how shocked Judai is, himself. He just wishes he would drop the honorific. It makes him feel older than he is. "Come in, I'll show you to your room. You must be tired."

"Oh, I get a room?" Judai asks as he steps inside, taking off his shoes even though he doesn't think anyone that lives here does that, to which Yusei's cheeks turn red. Shaking his head, Judai pats his back, careful to keep the contact friendly. Nice and casual. Easy. Why does Yusei make it feel so easy? "Just kidding, relax. And don't worry too much, jetlag doesn't usually hit me until the day after."

Yusei coughs into his fist, nodding. "Well, you'll be sharing with me, if that's alright."

Judai's heart simultaneously drops to his stomach and tries to escape up his throat. It's not a pleasant feeling, but he manages to grab hold of his panic before it makes him say something, well, *panicked*.

"Hey, no problem! Hope you're not a snorer, because I am," Judai looks around the place, sighing at the state of it. There's barely been a change, but from the couch being slightly more lopsided than he remembers, the TV a little less dusty, the door to the garage only half open. Yeah, he definitely doesn't fit there. Glancing at Yusei, he notices he's still in jeans and a t-shirt, so he must have not been home for long. It distracts him long enough for his mouth to run away from him. "And I don't sleep naked, so don't worry, I won't flash you."

Judai needs to cut off his own tongue like *yesterday*. Yusei makes a noise that's half agreement, half hesitation, his cheeks reddening even more, and then he just leads Judai towards his bedroom, offering to take his bag. Judai holds on to it and his backpack for the sake of maintaining some self-control. He's going to hell for this. Any good deed he's ever done has just been nullified. Yubel would be so disappointed.

"I actually had an issue with my mattress last week," Yusei clears his throat, opening the door to his room with an expression that says he *really* doesn't want to. Maybe Judai should have made this easier for them both and bailed on him, because he's doing that thing where he hunches over, trying to appear smaller under Judai's attention, a contrast to how confident he is about his work, his studies. Judai wants to straighten him up himself, tip his chin upwards with his fingers. "So, I've been using a futon while I figure out how to get a new one. I got you one as well. I hope you don't mind?"

Judai stares into the room, which isn't tiny, but it's a little busy, a shelf filled to the brink with books taking up a whole corner, and Yusei's desk claiming most of the space next to it. Yusei pushed his mattress-less bed up against the wall, so the floor was cleared up, occupied only by two already-opened futons and a whole bunch of pillows and blankets. All in all, Judai's had much, much worse.

"Nah, this is great. Don't worry 'bout it," Judai steps in and drops his bag on the floor, trying to be casual, shrugging off his backpack and then his

jacket. He feels Yusei staring and swallows, self-conscious of his basic-ass tee, but allows a smile to grow over his lips anyways, throwing his jacket at Yusei, chuckling when it hits his face. “Oi, help me unpack. I brought you gifts.”

Yusei does that thing, where he breaks eye contact and looks down at his feet, his own version of nervous fidgeting when he doesn’t have his gloves on. “Oh. No one’s given me a souvenir before— you didn’t have to.”

Judai’s a fool. He’s not really thinking as his body moves to approach Yusei, poking him in the stomach – *hello*, abs, how’ you doing – to get him to look at his face, grinning up at him like the clown he is. He deserves all the shit Asuka’s giving him about this. All of it. And Yusei deserves all the souvenirs that he could ever want and not want.

“Of course I had to, you’re even hosting me!” he says, and pokes Yusei’s stomach again, this time getting a proper reaction by having his hand swatted away, Yusei’s cheeks puffing up just a little as he holds back an indignant huff. He— he’s so cute. Judai won’t survive. “I bring all my friends gifts, except they’re kinda sick of me giving them cursed objects from other cultures, so I brought you a tee instead, since it’s more casual. And chocolate, because you can’t not try chocolate from Amsterdam.”

Yusei blinks down at him and tilts his head, opening and closing his mouth as his cheeks flush once more. “Thank you, Judai-san.”

“Drop the honorific, will ya? We’ve known each other for almost a year now,” Judai chuckles, grabs Yusei’s wrist so he can keep his eyes on him, pulling him into the room. He doesn’t like it when Yusei retreats into himself, because he’s already too quiet sometimes. He deserves to shine with the confidence he has figuring out a math problem that Judai can’t even start to read. “Say, where are the messy bunch you call friends? Haven’t heard them complaining ‘bout me yet!”

Yusei’s lips twitch with a smile, but he bites it down, teeth sinking into his bottom lip, before it can truly form. It’s a shame. “They’re actually busy tonight, preparing for a race. I think we won’t see them for a couple days, at least. They tend to fall asleep where they stand, these days.”

“So it’s only us, huh?” Judai grins, and Yusei rolls his eyes, probably sensing trouble. He’s not wrong. “I had dinner in the plane. You?”

“Yeah, actually.”

“Got some booze around here, then?”

Yusei smiles, looks at Judai with that look that’s almost guarantee to make Judai blush, so pure and fond, and nods. “I’ll help you unpack first.”

Judai’s tongue is sort of dead, so he only makes a humming sound in agreement, sitting on the floor and unzipping his bag. He’ll only be staying for a couple days, and then he’ll be off to fly again, this time just right over to Seoul, but Yusei insisted that he should be as comfortable as possible during his stay, saying he could make use of his empty drawers. Like the noble guy he is, Yusei doesn’t make a face at Judai’s underwear as Judai hands it to him, though he does seem a little judgmental of how bad he is at folding clothes, as in, he very rarely does so, going as far as to make Judai fold everything before even thinking of handing it to him.

“Jeez, you’re such a mom,” Judai mumbles, as Yusei corrects his way of folding over shirts. Yusei shoots him a stink eye for this, but Judai just winks at him in response. “It’s nice. Will you tuck me in later?”

Yusei sighs. “Maybe I’ll just ground you.”

Judai laughs, but the sound is cut short when Yusei pulls out a piece of folded fabric a little too enthusiastically and something comes rolling down onto the floor from the inside of it. Yusei’s apologizing already, reaching out to grab it, but Judai’s there first—snatching the toy from the floor before Yusei is even done speaking.

“Don’t worry,” Judai says, rushed from his lips in a breath, clenching the toy a little too hard and forcing himself to loosen his grip. He sits back down and grabs the fabric, kindly, off Yusei’s hands, folding it back up. “It’s all good.”

Yusei looks unsure of this, like he wants to apologize again, but Judai sends him a look that has him holding back, clenching his jaw before relaxing it, looking at the toy from a distance, eyes curious. Judai hesitates, not sure if this is something he's ever going to be ready to talk about but, well—he already saw, didn't he? There's nothing wrong with explaining a little, and it's not like Yusei will actually ask, since he's too nice for that.

“This is Neos,” Judai wiggles the toy, safely wrapped back up in fabric, and Yusei follows the motion with his eyes. “Just a buddy, you see. I need to find a proper way to drag him around again.”

Yusei makes a little sound, as if considering what to do with this information, but in the end he just mumbles out a tiny ‘*I see*’ and leaves it be. Judai appreciates it more than Yusei could possibly know, but he hopes his expression gives away how blessed he feels by his thoughtful behavior. They go back to folding clothes, and Yusei goes back to try and teach him, in vain, how to fold t-shirts.

Judai asks if it's okay for him to take the bathroom first, once they're done, but Yusei says he's fine with Judai changing in the same room as him, which sets off about a dozen alarm bells that Judai very stubbornly does not listen to, because he's whipped, and there's nothing wrong with two guys changing in a room, not at all, he's done it plenty of times, which is a bad, bad line of thought right now. He doesn't sneak peeks, because he's a *gentleman*, damn it, but he feels Yusei's eyes on his back a couple times, private thoughts that aren't his trying and thankfully failing to make it through Judai's resolve not to make this weird. It's sort of hopeless, anyways, because when he looks at what Yusei's wearing he feels like he's been put in purgatory.

Fuck, that's barely a tank top. It might as well be a second skin. Judai can see his nipples trying to poke through it, and it makes him silently pray to all the gods he knows of that this doesn't go downhill. He can't screw it up.

He can, however, sneak to the bathroom under the excuse of brushing his teeth so he can freak out about it for a few seconds before coming back into the room. Taking the chance, since his bag is now open, Judai makes a beeline for it, reaches inside one of its pockets, and throws the ‘*I heart*

Amsterdam’ t-shirt he bought for Yusei at him, half hoping he wears it over his tank top. He doesn’t. “Might look a little basic, not gonna lie, but you’re cute enough to wear it well.”

Yusei clears his throat very loudly at the compliment, looking at the shirt as if Judai just offered him a diamond ring. God. “Thank you, Judai-san.”

“I’ll bring you something cooler next time, that’s a promise. Probably not a cursed object, but you know,” Judai nods to himself, dropping to the ground to sit on one of the futons. If Yusei makes this face at this kind of gift, he can’t imagine how he’ll look when Judai actually gets him something more thought out. He was short on time for himself this time around. Reaching into the bag again, Judai puts out the chocolates, sighing at how the box is just a little crushed. “You know, I was told this chocolate goes great with wine, but I just want a beer. Or soda. I went to one too many new restaurants where all they had was wine menus.”

Yusei hums in response, his eyes soft as they look over at Judai on the floor. He folds the shirt with care and drops it on his desk, his hand lingering over the fabric, as if sacred, then reaches for the chocolate box, taking it with him. “I’ll go get us something, then.”

The second Yusei closes the door behind him, Judai grabs the nearest pillow, buries his face in it, and screams. Fuck, he’s in deep. He only realized it after one afternoon he was spending with Yusei at a local bar, with Jack and Crow for company, when Yusei had looked at him as he told a story of one of his trips, about that one time he got arrested in Paris. He had such soft eyes that night, attentive and shining under the lights, flushed cheeks, and a smile that turned into a full-blown laugh as Judai continued to speak. His heart had stopped, then, because Yusei didn’t look away from him for one second, and eventually had leaned in to press his forehead against his shoulder, when his laughter turned into drunken giggles, so he could hide his face. It had been a busy night at that bar, packed to the brim, so the four of them were in a tight corner, too close to each other, and yet Judai’s whole body had burned when Yusei did that, a small, insignificant contact lingering on him for days afterwards.

He was terrified, then. He still is. Because, contrary to popular belief, Judai's not oblivious. He can take a while to catch a hint, sure, but he is not blind to things that are obvious, and right now there's nothing more obvious than the fact that Yusei probably feels the same way he does. It's evident on the way he acts around him, how he seems to glow when they're around a lot of people and Judai only has eyes for him, how he unconsciously seems to stick to Judai's side when they go out, how he *looks* at him, like he's knows he's in too deep and doesn't want to stop it.

Judai's had messy relationships. Attempted relationships that were bad, *bad* ideas, and one of the biggest factors to their failure was his unreliability. He's always traveling, and he's always refused to quit his job or put it aside for someone else, because his job makes him *happy*, and it's his, and he can't stand to be at one place for too long without his skin crawling. It made him miss birthdays, it made him miss anniversaries, it made him miss all other sorts of celebrations, and it *hurt*, when they all finally tried to ask him to stay, because no one understood. No one could compromise with the fact that Judai comes in a packet, a packet that's a little crooked and probably will get lost in the mail more often than not, but one you can't just open, pick apart, and choose your favorites parts of before tossing the rest into the trash.

He wouldn't say he has trust issues, or problems with commitment— he trusts Johan, even though Johan broke his heart, and he broke Johan's. He trusts Edo, even though he hasn't spoken to him in years and they had something fleeting at best. He trusts the rest of his friends that he doesn't see as often as he should, but talks to on the phone every chance he gets. He'd do anything for them... but to stay.

So, really, what Judai is actually terrified of is... not as much Yusei breaking his heart, the way others have, because by this point Judai almost expects it. No, the thought of *himself* not being enough for Yusei is what haunts him, the thought that even if he tries and does his best he'll just end up ruining it, taking Yusei's entirely too forgiving heart and smashing it into pieces because, yeah, alright, Judai has trouble compromising, too, at times. He's not perfect. It takes two for a relationship to work.

And yet, he wants. He wants the surprise phone calls Yusei hits him with, he wants his sleepy voice over the phone because it's four in the morning in Japan and who knows what time where Judai is, he wants the coy grins and the curious eyes and the almost noble flair Yusei does things with, and the shy, drunken giggles. He wants the awfully dreadful rides in Yusei's bike because he doesn't know what a speed limit *is*, he wants to put his feet on the ground after a flight and know exactly where he's headed because there's no question about it in his heart.

But most of all, he wants to make it work, and he can't do that by jumping into it headfirst like he's always done. He owes Yusei the warnings that come with *him*, the explanations, he owes it to him to not leave him in the dark about how Judai works, as a person. He owes it to him to not give him false hope that Judai will change. To start this good and honest, healthy, so they can both be on the same page from the very beginning.

He's been denying it for three months, alright. Trying to convince himself he's confusing friendship with the first curious flickers of what could be a great love, but now that he's here, in Yusei's room, about to have a drink with him— it's time to put his big boy pants on, and break the thin ice between them. He just... needs to find the right moment to do so.

Like clockwork, Yusei steps back into the room with four cans held very carefully in one hand. Judai stands to help him, grabbing two of them, and they both sit over the futon, facing each other. Wordlessly, they both open a can each, clicking them together before taking a sip.

"Ah, this is not beer," Judai says immediately after he swallows, a grin splitting his features. "Canned cocktail, huh?"

"Jack likes to drink them," Yusei grins his way into another sip, licking his lips, his eyes the very definition of coy, twinkling with amusement. Judai commits the look to memory. "I don't hate them, myself."

Judai hums in agreement, closing his eyes for a few seconds. The silence is comfortable, and it's not too often in his day to day that he stops to bask in it, his world too large and too distracting, and his mind too fast even for him to catch up sometimes, but he finds that he often does it when he's around

Yusei. It's that quiet essence of his, his very soul like a soothing lullaby, and Judai wishes he could take it with him at all times, but that'd probably be kidnapping.

Still, he's not here to just silently drink. Opening his eyes, Judai catches Yusei staring, in that captivated way he does. It makes his heart go boom, for lack of a better word. "So, Yuu-kun, tell me how you've been doing! You hardly talk about yourself during our phone calls."

Yusei's whole expression sours. "What is that nickname?"

"I'm trying out new things. Should I try Yuu-chan? Sei-chan?" Judai teases, and finds himself unable to not smirk as Yusei progressively starts pouting. Scooting over so they're sitting closer together, almost side by side, Judai pokes his cheek with his finger, wishing he could take a picture. "Now, now, do answer my question, dear friend. You're such a baby sometimes, not wanting to indulge your elder."

Yusei hides the way his smile eats at his pout behind his can, swatting Judai's finger away. "You know what I do. Work, and study, and then work some more, and beat Jack at his own games."

"So, translation, you're killing it at school, you're making your boss want to marry you, and you're making Jack eat dirt," Judai winks, and Yusei snorts, shrugging with both shoulders, taking a long sip of his can. Judai follows through, already looking forward to the second one, since that's always the best one. "I thought you were reading those books I told you to check out. Got anything to say 'bout that, mister?"

Yusei lets out a deep sigh, as if expecting this question to come. Judai's, again, incredibly glad he didn't actually accidentally send his erotic novels rec list.

"I am, and I like them so far. They're very educational... but half of your list were foreign books," Yusei makes eye contact, raising an unimpressed eyebrow. "Judai-san, I don't know English. Or *French*, for that matter."

“A minor oversight from my part,” Judai quips, and Yusei playfully pushes him away, shaking his head. “I’ll teach you. Repeat after me, ‘*I, Fudo Yusei, have an amazing pair of buttloc—*’”

Unfortunately, Yusei seems to know *some* English, for he chokes on his drink and bursts out laughing, his cheeks turning crimson red. Judai’s on him immediately, patting his back, barely holding back his own manic grin. He probably shouldn’t have done that, sure, but he *loves* this, the way Yusei’s body curls with his laughter, like the sound is too big for his already bulky body, how it is in a higher pitch than one would expect from him, how his smile during it shows teeth, a thing so rare on his face.

“Judai-san,” Yusei wheezes out, followed by something so close to a whine that Judai feels it in his gut and has to take another huge gulp of his drink to be able to ignore it. He’s finished his first can. “*Judai-san*, what are you trying to teach me?”

“The truth,” Judai says, which causes Yusei to grab onto his wrist, a fit of giggles taking over him. “Oi, are you drunk already? We’re barely even started!”

Yusei shakes his head no, and leans into Judai’s space, almost against him, looking at him from underneath his eyelashes. “No, I just thought... you’re too interesting for me, Judai-san. It’s funny.”

Judai will certainly have a heart attack today. “What are you on about, now? You’re plenty interesting yourself, mister the former illegal-street-racer and scholarship kid.”

"You're so much," Yusei sighs, and Judai can tell it's a little lovesick, his heart shaking with it. Yusei doesn't say anything more, finishing up his drink and going for the second one – they’re both taking the idea of liquid courage too literally, it seems, with how fast they’re going – but an idea pops Judai's mind that has him stopping Yusei on his tracks, a mischievous smile forming over his lips. He pretends not to take offense at Yusei’s whispered, automatic ‘*oh no*’ when he sees his expression.

“You got anything stronger laying around?” He asks, and Yusei instantaneously looks worried. Judai scoffs. “Come on, I know you don’t have work tomorrow, and you always study ahead. Get proper drunk with me. We can play a game!”

“That sounds like a bad idea,” Yusei mumbles, biting his lip, and Judai inevitably stares at it, not even caring that Yusei can see that he’s looking. It’s the hesitation of his mouth opening that has Judai making eye contact again, and there’s something delicate in Yusei’s gaze, nervous, yet hopeful. Judai’s almost dizzy with it already, but Yusei leaning in even closer snaps him back into his body. “Judai-san... I think there’s something I should tell you—”

“Yusei,” Judai interrupts, and he can tell his own voice is a little too serious, so he conjures up a smile, the way he can do it only for Yusei. Yusei stares with big, gorgeous eyes, and Judai almost, *almost* regrets that he wants to start this right, if only because he’d like to steal a kiss. And maybe a hundred more after that. “Yusei, let’s talk about it later. There’s something I should tell you, too, but we should have fun first.”

Yusei hesitates again, unsure if he should push, but something in Judai’s expression must have been enough to convince him. “I... I think we have sake. And more canned cocktails.”

"That's good enough," Judai nods, and follows Yusei to the kitchen, helping him look for the sake. They find it behind a cereal box, and there isn't really that much left in the bottle, but they can make due with more canned cocktails. Judai's never been picky about his alcohol, or food in general, but he can tell Yusei's into the fruity, sweet things. Judai could show him a world of flavor, if he allowed him to. If he wanted him to.

"Alright!" Judai claps his hands together, vibrating with energy, once they're back in Yusei's room, sitting across each other again. Judai keeps his distance this time, because he's noticed Yusei gets touchy when drunk, and he'd like to keep *some* of his sanity after tonight. Yusei, for his part, doesn't look that excited, but that glint in his eye says he's curious. Judai can work with curious. "So, I know you've gone drinking with a few classmates, so I expect you to know this game—"

"Are we really doing this?" Yusei grumbles, fingering the shot glasses they found and brought with them into the room, in order to make the game work. "I would have thought that someone your age, Judai-san..."

"Oi, don't start!" Judai laughs, and takes the shot glasses from him, filling them with sake. Tequila would be better, or whiskey, but they're not doing too badly with sake. "This is a proper sleepover, Yusei. Live with the consequences of inviting me over. You have to be a good host for your senpai."

Yusei's cheeks warm at the word '*senpai*', so Judai puts a pin on it. It might help him much, much later down the line, if everything goes well. "The game, then?"

Judai grins. "Never have I ever. Five questions, five points for the both of us, just so we don't embarrass ourselves that much and you don't whine about it later."

Yusei puffs up his cheeks, though Judai doesn't think he's aware of that. "I don't whine..."

No, you mewl, more like, Judai almost says, but he appreciates his life. Yusei would probably try to choke him if he told him that. Instead, he opens two of the canned cocktails and hands one to Yusei, who raises an eyebrow but takes it nonetheless, going for a sip right away, which Judai imitates.

"I'm guaranteeing drunkenness. I want you smashed and unable to walk come morning," Judai says without thinking, and doesn't realize the innuendo until after he processes Yusei's breathing quickening. Well. Nothing he can do about it now. "I'll give you one free by letting you start."

Yusei grunts, putting on his game face, squints at his can as he takes another sip, and nods. "Never have I ever gotten lost in a foreign city."

Judai raises his shot glass, keeping down a snort— yeah, he should have seen that coming.

"A good one," he nods after swallowing, filling his shot glass again. "I got lost in New York, when I first went there. Wasn't fun, let me tell you that."

"How did you cope?" Yusei tilts his head to the side, like he does when he's curious about Judai's stories. But Judai doesn't want to make it all about him, today, or think about those things too hard in order to recall details. He just wants to look at Yusei. "Asked for directions?"

"Eh, mostly drank the issue away," Judai smirks to himself, watches Yusei shake his head in disapproval. "Hey, no judgment tonight! So— never have I ever broken the speed limit and gotten away with it."

Yusei opens his mouth, Judai raises his eyebrows at him, and then Yusei silently takes his shot. He dives right into his next turn as he holds up his shot glass for Judai to fill up, licking his lips. It almost makes Judai drop the fucking bottle. "Never have I ever learned more than three languages and spoken them fluently."

Judai chokes on a sip of his can. "And *how* would you know that? How much have I let slip, huh?"

Yusei hides his mouth with his own can, shrugging. "I might have looked you up on the internet after getting your last name."

"You little *cheat!*" Judai feels a huge smile splitting his features, his heart going as fast as a rabbit, jumping in his chest. He takes his shot, and scoots over like he did before to sit right next to Yusei, their shoulders brushing. "Do you think this is going to be a close game, huh?"

"I think I ran out of questions I definitely know the answer to already, unless I want to look like a stalker," Yusei shrugs again, and seemingly without realizing it, leans his weight against Judai's shoulder, his smile content. "I'd be fine with losing."

"Yeah, right," Judai rolls his eyes, knowing how competitive he can get if he wants to, looking into Yusei's eyes for a second. God, he's gorgeous. "I'm going to risk it— never have I ever been confused with a fashion model."

Yusei's mouth twitches. "Neither have I."

Judai groans out loud and takes a shot for the sake of it. Yusei follows through, and seemingly miscalculates the distance between the glass and his hand, for he hits his teeth and a few drops run down his cheeks. Judai wants to lick it off him. "We're keeping our points, c'mon."

"Is that how that works?" Yusei switches to his cocktail, his smile widening. "That sounds like you are the one who doesn't want to lose."

"I'm good at winning," Judai nudges Yusei's side with his elbow and licks his lips. It's too soon to be tipsy, at least for him, but alcohol always seems to hit Yusei a little faster, loosening up his limbs, getting that big weight off his back. Judai loves to see it. "C'mon, stop using my job as a winning ticket or I'll use yours, you cheater."

Yusei looks at Judai like he wants to argue against that, but in the end just sighs, bringing his knees up to his chest to lean his chin over them. "Never have I ever... joined a cult?"

Judai hesitates, and Yusei stares at him for full five seconds before a giggle escapes him, an adorable sound that he immediately covers with his mouth. Judai takes his shot and says nothing more, watching with a grimace. Yusei gets himself under control, tries to make eye contact, fails, and tries again. "May I ask *where*, at least?"

"The underground life of Italy can be strange," Judai says, his voice rather grim, and this has Yusei finally laughing, has Judai letting himself smile. "It's a funny story for another day, just... vampires, dude. They're real."

"Did you get high while in Italy?"

Judai ignores the question. "Never have I ever gone into a bar and asked for milk."

Watching Yusei huff like an offended kitten is something Judai will *never* get tired of. He could look at it every single day of his life. Wants to, even. It's as terrifying as it is exhilarating. As Yusei takes his shot, Judai finishes

his second can, opens his third. He fully intends to get smashed enough to have a good excuse to not wake up early tomorrow.

Yusei struggles for a second to come up with something, his eyes squinting up to the ceiling. “I think I’m going to lose. I can’t come up with anything... um, never have I ever gotten engaged?”

“Oh, you could have had that,” Judai chuckles, and Yusei blinks at him in surprise, his eyebrows raising. “I almost got accidentally engaged to someone. Good thing it was in high school— never have I ever aced all sections of an exam.”

“You’re just going to brush over that?” Yusei snorts, takes his shot, and leans his weight further into Judai. Wasn’t he supposed to be keeping his distance? It seems like a faraway thought now, but he doubts that would stop Yusei’s heat-seeking self from ending up using Judai like a pillow. Not every battle must be won.

“I’d rather keep her out of this, for her sake,” Judai snickers into his drink, closing his eyes in order to think of something good. A thought pops into his mind, as he considers what his next question will be, of an off-handed joke Crow made once, about Yusei’s dating life, and Judai can’t help snicker with it. He might steal a victory. “Go on, ask away.”

“Never have I ever pet a crocodile,” Yusei blurts out, and Judai swears out loud. He takes his shot and a gulp of his can, because he’s fired up over this ridiculous party game. Yusei’s reactions make it all worth it. “*Seriously?*”

“I have a friend with a pet crocodile. No, I don’t understand it either, but she’s lovely,” Yusei opens his mouth, but Judai doesn’t give him a chance. “Never have I ever gone on a date and not realized it was a date until after it was over, and only because my date told me so.”

Yusei pouts. “Not fair. Aki didn’t specify...”

He trails off like he knows it’s a weak excuse, and Judai doesn’t stop himself from bringing up a hand to run it through Yusei’s hair, chuckling. He finds it adorable, how Yusei makes himself so small, practically a ball

now, only held up by his feet, his ass, and his shoulder resting against Judai's. It makes him want to wrap him up in blankets and kiss his forehead goodnight.

"You can resort to desperate means to win any second now," Judai points out, as Yusei takes his shot, and doesn't do much other than laugh at the elbow to his gut that it wins him. "We're tied over the last point! That just makes it all the more interesting."

"You banned me from valid pathways to victory," Yusei grumbles against his knees, so Judai pulls at his hair. In response, Yusei elbows him again, shooting him a dirty side eye, so Judai goes back to petting. He's very much like a big kitten. "Ah, I can't think of anything..."

"Well, not to help you, but there must be something blasphemous I've done that you haven't because you're such a good boy," Judai grins to himself, but Yusei's long pause has him looking at him closely, only to find him with his head turned away. His ears are red, and a mischievous smile makes his way to Judai's lips. "Oh, did you think of something *dirty*, Yusei? Or is it that you don't like being called a good boy, you mean street racer?"

Yusei shakes his head and turns all of his body towards Judai. Judai has his arm resting over Yusei's shoulder now, hair petting forgotten, so it's suddenly a little like they're about to cuddle. He can't say he's against it, considering how Yusei is biting his lip in thought, his cheeks flushed from alcohol and perhaps something more, his blue eyes shiny.

"Just..." Yusei starts, licks his lips, and tightens his hands into fists. Judai suddenly feels tension between them, tension that's probably been in the air for a while now, and from this close it is almost impossible for him to not *feel* Yusei, both physically and emotionally, though he manages to brush over it with some effort. He doesn't want to intrude, especially when Yusei's giving him such a delicate, insecure look. "Don't laugh, is all."

Judai grunts in protest. "I'd never make fun of you— not if you're not okay with a few jokes at your expense, that is."

“Right,” Yusei nods to himself, shaking his head as if to clear it, and clears his throat, his cheeks getting redder, if possible, color traveling all the way to his chest as Judai follows its bloom, his eyes snapping back up when he notices the nipples again. Better to focus. “So, Judai-san... never have I ever had... sex.”

Judai’s ears pop, though that might actually just be his mind hitting a panic button. He blinks. “Come... *come again*, Yusei-kun?”

Yusei pouts, breaking eye contact. “That’s kinda of the point, Judai-san. I haven’t. Ever. Not... not with someone.”

At first, Judai is confused by that response, then he remembers the way he worded his question and nearly chokes on his own tongue, spluttering. Words leave his mouth before he can think about it. “I don’t believe you.”

“I wouldn’t lie about that,” Yusei mumbles, and to Judai’s horror, buries his face into his knees, depriving Judai of looking at his expression. It’s the cutest thing he’s seen in his whole cursed life. “I know it’s weird—”

“What? No, no, I don’t think you’re weird, it’s not uncommon and nothing to be ashamed about, it’s just—” Judai sighs, gestures helplessly with his can and almost spills over his drink, so he leaves it off to the side, where they’re unlikely to knock it off. “You are, uh. You’re so— you’re gorgeous. And one of the nicest, most selfless people I’ve met. You’re a catch! I should probably stop talking, but, you know, now I’m just getting kind of offended, because you’re *absolutely* a catch! Are you sure you’ve never even gotten like, a handjob, maybe a blowjob—”

Suddenly, Yusei’s head snaps up, and one of his hands slaps over Judai’s mouth, his eyes panicked and his face so red Judai’s actually concerned something might happen to him. “Yes, I’m sure! I just... I was never interested in that. Not even like a one-night thing, I just wasn’t, and I wasn’t really interested in people, either... It just never happened.”

Judai stares at Yusei’s crestfallen expression with wide eyes, blinking, and slowly takes his hand off his shoulder in order to remove Yusei’s hand from his mouth, his heart beating wildly in his ears.

“You weren’t?” Judai asks, and Yusei starts nodding before Judai can finish. “As in, that’s not the case anymore?”

Something flickers, like stars about to go out in the sky, in Yusei’s eyes, something on the edge of cautious and hopeful. Judai stares, because sometimes Yusei’s eyes are so *old*, sometimes it feels like his soul is battle worn and heavy, longing for a nap underneath the wisdom living in it—but then Judai looks at him, *really* looks at him, and he’s hit by the beauty of calm ocean waves, of starlight paths, of free falling and knowing you’ll be alright once your feet hit the ground.

It’s captivating, how such a juxtaposition can exist within someone so perfectly balanced, and the black hole inside Judai’s own soul loves to suck this in, this light, this feeling of rightness. He’s always tried too hard, taken whatever he was given in an attempt to quell a hunger that only moving, constantly and everywhere, could satisfy in its entirety. Only Johan hadn’t blanched at Judai up and going to take walks at three a.m. by himself just to end up taking trips out of town, only really understood the *itch*, and he’s still the only one that does, even though they haven’t been anything other than friends for the last few years. But it eventually proved too much for Johan, too, and Judai couldn’t have blamed him, someone that was clearly meant for something more than chasing after Judai’s ghost.

Judai doesn’t know anymore, if he’s more terrified of it being too much for Yusei, or of it being too little. Being under the focus of his attention is like having a light shine directly over his eyes, and Judai’s been blind for so long, and looking for it for so much longer, that he doesn’t even flinch at it. He just stares back.

“Judai-san,” Yusei whispers, and he’s wearing the expression he puts on when he’s trying to get it across that he’s an adult, that there’s strength beneath his skin and an iron will rooted to the very source of his soul, that his kindness isn’t a weakness. It’s like being exposed out into the world for the first time, like being filled with wonder when you know that what you’re looking at is greater than yourself. “Judai-san, I...”

And that’s the thing about Yusei, Judai thinks, that for all his glory, he’s still painfully human. Before Judai can really register what he’s doing, he’s

leaning in, closing an inappropriate amount of the distance between them, his heart pounding but his mind calm, if only for now.

“I know,” Judai whispers back, and smiles, slow, thoughtful, honest. The way he doesn’t let just anyone see him smile, because it shows the cracks in his armor, the spots where he hasn’t been able to put himself back together for years. Yusei looks at him with wide eyes, and a breath escapes his lips, ghosting over Judai’s, shaky and with the scent of alcohol. Judai laughs a little, low, from the back of his throat, and resists the urge to pull Yusei closer. “Yusei, I *know*. I’m just... too in my head to actually make the first move, I think. Too terrified of you.”

“What does that even mean?” Yusei sounds almost offended at that, but Judai can tell that he’s just trying to get himself under control. He saw something, just now, something in Judai’s eyes that must have made him wonder if he was being too much, too soon. Judai doesn’t know how to tell him he’s perfect.

But, ah. This is where the ice wall breaks, isn’t it? “A lot comes with me. I don’t know how to introduce you to that without making you run the other way. I won’t just... change. Or want different things for myself. You need to understand that.”

Yusei frowns, then, the way he frowns at his food when it’s cold, the way he frowns at the weather— like he’s found an issue unprecedented, but not impossible to solve. It’s probably one of the handful of times Judai’s been considered a problem with a solution.

“We’ve known each other for months, now. Almost a year,” Yusei starts, his voice low and careful, and Judai wants to kiss that away, bat away the hesitation. He can’t do so, yet. “I don’t think anything about you could surprise me in a bad way.”

“You’re pretty open minded, if I do say so myself,” Judai shakes his head, struggles to gather his courage under Yusei’s attentive gaze. “It’s just... I’ve messed up my relationships before, because of my job. I don’t want to mess up what we have, what we *might* have, because... it’s you. I don’t think I could forgive myself if I mess up *you*.”

Yusei's expression shifts to understanding, almost instantaneously, making it a little harder for Judai to breathe and to keep his expectations low, as Yusei lets out a sigh through his nose, searching Judai's face for something. What it is, he has no idea, but it seems like he finds it, for his words almost make Judai's heart stop, with the way Yusei's eyes melt, the raw want in them becoming apparent.

"Maybe I want to be messed up," Yusei says, and it's barely above a whisper, but it feels loud in the quiet around them, in how there's no one else at home, in how it's just *them*, wearing their hearts on their sleeves tonight. Enough cat and mouse, enough pining. "Judai-san, you know I don't care about that."

"About what?" Judai asks, his voice strangled, and Yusei moves—he takes over Judai's leftover space, holding onto his shoulders as he balances on his toes and then practically climbs over his lap, each of his knees on the floor right next to the outside of Judai's thighs, but not actually sitting on top of him, their bodies brushing but not really touching. Judai's tongue feels heavy in his mouth, dry, as he looks up at him, and swallows when eye contact is made.

His hands move to Yusei's waist on their own, helping him not lose his balance, but it's more than that and they both know it.

"About your job," Yusei elaborates, and Judai can see he's having a hard time too, his chest rising up a little too fast to be casual. It reminds Judai once more of how what he's wearing can barely count as a shirt, and something in him *burns*. "Judai-san, I said it when we first met. Whether you're here or not, that doesn't change anything for me. That I... that I *like you*, like I haven't liked anyone before—that's just a plus. Or at least I'd like it to be."

Something in Judai's chest tightens, painfully so. "Will you be able to say that in a month? Two, three? Seven?"

Yusei's eyes are so, so soft. He has such a kind look to him, overall, even though he's bulky and rides a bike and dresses like he's going to kick your

ass, sometimes, but it's the eyes, windows to the soul, that actually allow people to see that. They never fail.

"I think I will," Yusei nods, slowly, but not hesitantly. Judai can see him imagining it, him being here and Judai being everywhere else, for months on end, with no other form of contact other than a phone which Judai could lose or forget at any second. And instead of the disappointment he's seen in other faces when they picture this, the brush-off of saying they'll get used to it, Judai sees Yusei nodding to himself again, shrugging with both shoulders. It's already enough to break his heart. "I think I will. I can't expect you to pick me, or anyone else, over what makes you happy. It's who you are, even. You take care of people, and all you want in return is to be allowed to do what you love."

"That's such an oversimplification, don't you think?" Judai breathes out, and a part of him wants to laugh so badly, because of course, *of course* it's Yusei who finds such blunt, simple words to describe what chokes up Judai's throat at times. It makes a frown make its way to his face, and one of Yusei's hands rises up to run a finger over it, as if to smooth it away. "Yusei, it's— I'm a lot to ask for. And you're so wonderful, and smart, and interesting, and you probably have secret fan clubs all over the city. You could do better than me."

"No," Yusei snaps, and then he softens. "No, I couldn't. You're... you're it. Or you *could* be it. So don't say that."

It's such an absolute response, Judai doesn't dare to even question it. "Is it bad, that I feel the same?"

Yusei's lips curl upwards, and he lets himself fall, then, his weight settling over Judai, arms wrapping around his shoulders in a hug.

"Judai-san. We can make it work," Yusei speaks next to his ear, and Judai's gotten this all wrong, because perhaps he's the one who will come out of this, crashed and burned for life, while Yusei eventually moves on, if they mess it up somehow. But he'd be okay with that. "I believe in us."

And maybe Judai's been waiting to hear something like that come from someone like Yusei for all his life, because his attempts at holding on to hopeless realism and skepticism break down then, crash at his feet, at the same time he hugs Yusei back and lets himself fall backwards, onto the pillows and blankets they haven't even touched all night, among the cans and the glasses and the sake.

He's tired. He doesn't want to fight this anymore. Even if this ends badly, he'll have no regrets. It'd be an honor to be ruined by one Fudo Yusei.

"Yusei," Judai says, turning his head to look at Yusei as they lay down properly, limbs tangling, an unspoken agreement passing between them. "Close your eyes."

Yusei does so, easy and trustful, and Judai can tell that he expects – or rather, *wants*, so obviously that Judai is a little breathless with it – a kiss, but Judai likes to make things fun, which sometimes might be a code word for difficult.

So, he leans in, drops a kiss, reverent in his softness, over Yusei's nose, then another one over his cheek, the space between his eyebrows, leans over him so he can kiss his forehead and temple too. When Judai's done, sitting up to pick up the empty bottles around them and the not-so-empty ones, he catches Yusei looking at him, his eyes on fire, and Judai can't help but smirk.

"I don't kiss before the first date," he shrugs, and it's a lie, but one he'll live for Yusei, who seemed to have been born to be worshipped. Judai wants to take his time.

Yusei doesn't say anything, but he helps pick up their trash as well, makes sure they'll both be comfortable once they're ready for bed by dividing up the pillows and blankets onto each futon, his expression somewhere between relieved and raw with longing. So, once the lights are off and they're both laying there, Judai reaches out blindly and pulls him in, drags him into his futon despite Yusei's protests, and almost forcibly makes him tuck his head under Judai's chin. He seems reluctant to wrap his arms around him, despite having the nerve to sit on his lap only minutes ago, but

Judai kisses the top of his head and he gives up fighting, accepting Judai's warmth.

"I'll take you out on a date tomorrow. I'll show you to the best pizza place in all of New Domino and make sure it's romantic as fuck," Judai mumbles, resisting the temptation to sneak a hand under Yusei's weak attempt at a shirt. A happy hum is all the answer he gets, but Judai doesn't sweat it. Yusei is a little bit of a sleepy drunk, sometimes. "And, just so you know—I like you too."

A snort, movement that Judai recognizes as Yusei nodding. "Judai... I know."

Judai's scared, still. But he believes in them, too.

Notes for the Chapter:

sooooooft

5. first trip together

Notes for the Chapter:

there's a bunch of firsts inside this one. count them up lol

also im not putting this in explicit yet, but this chapter does have a handjob described in depth. thread with caution, loves.

Judai is absolutely appalled by the reveal. "What do you mean you've never been out of Domino?"

Yusei, for all his stoicism, can really suck at keeping his poker face around Judai. It's something he's quite proud of, if Judai says so himself, simply because Yusei tries *so hard* to not look awkward under his eyes that he fails rather spectacularly at it. He starts ducking his chin, stops halfway through the gesture, and then nervously brings the straw of his drink to his lips, eyes looking off to the side as he hums in answer, the slightest reddening of his cheeks bringing the whole picture together.

He probably looks pretty normal to anyone else, perhaps even smooth, but Judai's stared at him so much that he's memorized him like the back of his hand— well, as much as he's been able. Judai still doesn't know how to approach sex, even if he's not particularly interested in pushing their relationship that far yet. Like, sure, Yusei gets his more riled up than Judai can remember ever *being* just by sitting there, looking gorgeous, but he's been doing a bunch of trip planning and mentoring and what-not for the Manjoume Group lately, and it means he'd rather talk to Yusei and kiss his face and cuddle the shit out him rather than, say, stick his dick in his mouth, or something like that.

Not that he would be *opposed*—

But he has other priorities, like lightly kicking Yusei on the shin so he'll actually answer Judai's question. "Didn't you live in Den City for a few years?"

Yusei eyes up Judai, right from under his eyelashes and, really, that's just not *fair*, they're in a *public space*—

"I did. For about three years," Yusei shrugs, bites his straw and then releases it with a sigh, looking like he'd rather be anywhere but here. Which is kind of disappointing, because this is Judai's favorite burger place, but he guesses he kind of killed the mood by bringing this up. "That was after, you know... before the city finished rebuilding."

Judai reaches for Yusei's hand, resting over the table, tangling their fingers together and nodding. Yusei doesn't talk much about that period of his life, and Judai can accept that, since they haven't been dating for that long or known each other for much longer, so he doesn't ask too many questions. Judai is fine with them taking their time to learn each other as deep as they'll go, but he'll never stop showing support for the unspoken hurt that flashes across Yusei's eyes. He was never close to his parents, to be honest, so he can't possibly comprehend Yusei's pain, not really— but he can understand when a loss runs so deep that even when you're alright, when you have accepted it and moved on and grown out of it, you can't really get a word out.

"Well, that counts, doesn't it?" Judai smiles at him, keeping it simple and open, letting Yusei meet him in the middle. Four months is not a long relationship, especially when Judai hasn't actually *been* here for at least half of that time, but Judai can feel it in his gut and his heart that it's the best first four months he's ever had with someone that he'll ever have with someone. They might not give everything to each other yet, but Judai thinks they'll get there, eventually.

Thankfully, Yusei relaxes, smiling back, squeezing Judai's hand, and finally ceasing the torture of watching him tongue that straw by letting his drink down. God, Judai's never been so successfully provoked by *soda*.

"I guess it does, but I wasn't really a friend of the city. It was..." Yusei looks down towards the table, at their joined hands, at the remnants of their food, and tilts his head to the side, squeezing his fingers just-so. "...it wasn't Domino. And I was preoccupied with other things."

"Ah," Judai nods, his grin widening, almost melting at how Yusei's mood seems to lift with it. "You mean that baby cousin of yours you don't want me to meet."

Yusei chuckles at this, and in an unexpected act of what Judai can only assume is *seduction* successfully being used as a distraction, he brings Judai's hand up to his lips and kisses his fingers, one by one, not even minding the remnants of ketchup where Judai didn't quite get in with his napkin.

"God," Judai mumbles, out loud, not actually intending the words to leave his lips. "You know, we can leave *right now* if that's how you're feeling—"

Yusei kicks him under the table, shaking his head with a laugh, which Judai thinks it's fair. Not everything Yusei does is an attempt at proving Judai's a degenerate, but it feels like that sometimes— Judai is *not* hallucinating those bedroom eyes. He isn't. It's the look Yusei had that night, before their first date, when Judai didn't steal a kiss. He might be a fool, but he's not oblivious to his boyfriend of four months, looking at him as if he's waiting for the right moment to attack Judai, like he does when he sits on his lap, or when he '*accidentally*' lets an innuendo slip. Yusei's an angel, alright, and Judai has no recorded proof of it, but he has *quite* the dirty mind. He just pretends he doesn't, as if he doesn't share an apartment with *Crow*, of all people.

Alright, he takes it back, Judai *might* be more interested than he lets on in sex, but it's *not* at the top of his priority list, and he doubts it's in Yusei's list at all. Yusei's new to it all, so Judai's playing it safe, and honestly? He could hear him speak for hours, even about math. Yusei makes *math* sexy.

"I do want to take a nap," Yusei says, oblivious to Judai's internal horny crisis. Honestly, it's better that way. Judai once tried to grope his butt in public, just to get a nice, comforting feel, and Yusei *shrieked*. It was cute, but Yusei couldn't look him in the eye for hours afterwards. "Or were you going somewhere with your questions about my travelling experiences?"

"Oh, right," Judai straightens up on his seat, his previous idea coming back to him in a rush. He gets so derailed. He can tell why Asuka always says

talking to him is like going on a roller coaster. "We should take a trip together!"

Yusei opens his mouth, closes it. "Hm, as in, to the other side of town?"

Judai's the one that kicks him this time.

"I mean to like, at *least*, some outdoor house retreat, in the woods, or camping, y'know," Judai sighs, pouts at Yusei in an attempt to look innocent, but judging by Yusei's narrowing eyes it doesn't quite work. Judai seemed to have lost the ability to be adorable when he turned eighteen, or maybe everyone started seeing through his shit. Either way, it means Yusei's the cute one out of the two of them, and he's happy with that. "I was originally going to take you to Paris, but I think Europe's a bit much for your first time—"

Yusei chokes on air, apparently, cheeks flaming red, and Judai's not even sorry. "—I mean your first *trip*, you perv. Honestly, and you complain about me."

Despite how he's obviously embarrassed, Yusei finds it in himself to laugh, softly enough that it can barely be called that, and Judai stares with what he's sure is the most captivated expression he's ever worn. He doesn't remember the baby steps of falling in love ever being this easy, nor this soft or safe, but he's not regretting any of it, yet.

"I wouldn't be opposed to that. Break's boring this year," Yusei leans over the table by his elbows, doing that thing where his back slightly arcs and brings out his chest. Now this, Judai knows it's unintentional, because Yusei got really shy when Judai mentioned liking his pecs just this morning. Doesn't make the view any less enjoyable. "I guess I'm earning more now, but I'm missing being a mechanic."

"You're still a mechanic," Judai takes advantage of their closeness and leans in, pressing a kiss over Yusei's nose. He blinks at it, not really reacting until he remembers they're in public, to which he ducks his chin again. Adorable. "You're just more selective now. Though, I'm glad they gave you two weeks off. When was the last time you had that much time for yourself?"

Yusei frowns, which is just an attempt at quelling his pout because he knows Judai has a point. "...I don't know."

"See, listen to your senior; you deserve to relax. I'm always right," Judai drops another kiss, this time over his cheek, and sits back with a grin, ignoring Yusei's now very obvious pout, pulling out his phone. "So, I've already picked places I thought you'd like..."

They're all within driving distance of New Domino, but well out into the wilderness. Judai did actually plan to just fly Yusei over to Paris, or maybe somewhere more casual within the country, charm his pants off – *figuratively* – with his knowledge of the city, of France, of the language, but he knew that would be a little too much. Other couples travel to France, or to Europe in general, to get engaged, or for their honeymoons. Not really for a first ever trip together. Besides, Judai wanted to check out these places himself. They have all opened up over the last year, and he can't neglect any new hotspots in Japan, or he would be bad at his job.

Perhaps predictably, Yusei likes the one closest to the city the best, but that's also the one that has a hot spring and a massage parlor *and* doesn't make you participate in group activities. Judai likes group activities, but he's willing to go for the lone wolf experience with Yusei, if that means more time together. Everything for his boo.

"We should leave the day after tomorrow," Judai says, to which Yusei's eyebrows fly up in surprise. It makes him reach out to fiddle with the collar of Yusei's dress shirt, where it's a little wrinkled, letting his fingers brush against skin as he makes eye contact, smiling. "I'm tired of sharing you. We should enjoy your two weeks before I'm off again."

Yusei bites his lower lip, looking at Judai with those intense eyes, the ones that feel like Yusei could tear your soul apart from your body, and then slowly starts nodding, clearing his throat.

"Yeah," he whispers, blinking rapidly, his hand coming up to hold Judai's, which is still lingering over his shoulder, against his neck. "Yeah, I agree."

Judai hasn't been this excited to be travelling with someone in ages. He wouldn't say he dislikes it, but most people in his life aren't used to Judai's rather cut-throat approach to trips, or if they are, they aren't quite smooth at it yet. Judai knows every trick in the book – and then some – on how to get good seats, how to get good flights, how to pack his things, how to keep himself from being robbed at any point, how to talk to people in the plane so they will either help him make the trip enjoyable or leave him alone—but road trips are different for him.

Judai likes his road trips fast and loud. While flying feels like a calculated game of poker, road trips feel almost like a whim every single time, even though more often than not they're planned. He likes the windows down, the radio loud, the games to keep himself entertained, the awful bathroom stops, and the feeling of accomplishment that it is to finally arrive at his destination.

Jun absolutely *hates* doing road trips with him because of that, and Asuka would rather never be in a car when Judai's driving. The last time he had a road trip with Johan, many, many years ago now, they ended up fighting and then fucking, and Shou got so sick when he was up for it that Judai had to turn back around. So, Judai's excited— he gets another person to terrorize. Or, so he thinks, during the rest of the day and the next one as they prepare for it, but reality is much different.

First, Yusei offered to drive, which Judai's fine with, since he gets to play with the radio all he wants, and Yusei *is* a much better driver than him, in the sense that he probably won't make them crash this rented car if they go fast. Second, Yusei's very much like a concerned mother, asking Judai to double check directions and if he's been drinking water and if he needs a nap, if his phone is fully charged, and he's not at all bothered by the windows being down and the radio being on. And lastly, Yusei likes to sing.

Judai almost missed it, at first, because he was looking at their GPS, the radio playing a soft ballad that set a nice mood in the car, and it was so faint Judai almost thought he imagined it, up until he looked at Yusei and saw him mouthing the words. Judai chose to say nothing, smiling a private smile and finishing his double check of their route, sitting back and closing his eyes

for the rest of the song, listening and enjoying Yusei's soft, almost unconscious and uncertain drawls.

He finds himself singing along, just as softly and not opening his eyes, because he doesn't want Yusei to stop. Judai remembers hearing this song a lot the last time he was in the US, so he's surprised Yusei knows it, since he might not fully understand it due to the language barrier, but he's not complaining at all. The song ends all too soon, and when Judai opens his eyes Yusei's looking straight ahead at the road, just as diligent as before, but his ears are pink.

As if feeling his eyes on him, Yusei speaks. "You have a nice singing voice."

Judai's smile, which he's starting to think might be a permanent staple around Yusei, and has been for months now, grows. "You're not too bad yourself, babe."

"Don't," Yusei starts, blushing even more furiously, visibly struggling not to do the cute things that come so natural to him, like puff his cheeks or let his lips curl into a pout, or tilt his head with a side-eye. It's a losing battle when Judai's around. "I haven't gotten used to pet names yet."

"Well, you know what they say, darlin'" Judai smirks, wishing Yusei could turn his eyes towards him, if only to witness his full reaction. "A rose by another name is just as sweet, and all that."

"Fuck off," Yusei shakes his head, chuckling, but he seems to be permanently red, now. Judai loves to see it. "I thought you would have been trying to get me to play games by now."

"It was next on the list, yeah," Judai shrugs, and reaches over to lay a hand over Yusei's knee, not wanting to force him to take a hand off the wheel. Yusei always grips those like a lifeline. "But I like just looking at you and hearing you sing *just* fine."

Yusei takes his eyes off the road for a second, just one, so he can properly smile at Judai, wide and sweet as honey.

"I don't usually listen to music, but I like this song," Yusei pauses, taking in a deep breath. "It reminded me of you when I heard it for the first time."

Judai's heart skips a beat. "And you know what the song's about?"

"Just about enough," Yusei nods, and then lets out that breath through his nose, hesitating on other words but managing to let them out. "Judai, I know it's only been four months, but they've been... the best I've ever had."

Judai can feel his smile turn sad, but not the bad kind— some things just make you so happy that it makes you sad, when you think that it might not always be that way. When you're holding on to raw hope.

"I thought the same thing, when we were having lunch the other day," Judai sighs, closing his eyes. "You know I've been in relationships before. That they've ended badly. But you... you're something else. I'm still terrified."

"Me too," Yusei whispers back, but he's smiling, his eyes shining. "But we're terrified together, aren't we?"

Judai laughs, and he's still shocked at how little it hurts to do so around Yusei. "As long as we can get away with it, babe. You're like I'm being wrapped up in cotton and blankets, like the freshest, tallest drink of water, like the sweetest fucking chocolate I've ever tasted—"

Yusei has quite a few protests to this, and he splutters over them, trying to get Judai to quit praising him, but sometimes it's all that he can say, to express his feelings. Judai might not know every nook and cranny of Yusei yet, or at least he doesn't know the specifics of the things that keep him up at night, that keep him pushing so hard, that make Judai pull him into bed to get him to rest when he's around, that make him *feel* like he's lived for centuries when Judai looks through him. But he knows just enough, right now, to be certain that the second Yusei opens the door, Judai will open it back.

God, if Judai hadn't approached him during that street race, he might not have this. Bless his questionable choices. The terror will fade. It already is, actually, not as powerful as it was when they were having that date, or

before that. He's getting used to Yusei being his North Star, and fuck, will Judai make sure they don't mess it up past the point of repair. He's never wanted to be so honest and thoughtful before, to give himself away as a package instead of in bits and pieces because that's all people could take, and he's never felt more seen before, than with Yusei. And he thinks Yusei feels the same.

They switch seats halfway through the trip, and Yusei falls into a nap almost the second his head hits the headrest, holding onto Judai's hands and snoring softly into his shoulder. The camp they're heading to is just two hours away from New Domino, once you make it into the highway, so they left the city at around noon, but Yusei's in a constant state of tiredness as of late. He got that shiny new job, that's still mostly an internship, and he's really going for that master's degree, full speed ahead. Judai doesn't know where he gets all the energy and motivation for it, but he guesses everyone could say the same about him and his job. Either way, he's happy for Yusei, even if he wishes he would catch a few more hours of sleep every night.

Yusei has no concept of rest. Judai learned this about two months into knowing him, when he realized that in order for them to talk on the phone, despite the time zone difference, Yusei must have been going to bed very late and waking up very early. He had insisted on being used to it, and that he woke up before the sun rose permanently anyways, but Judai has had none of it when he's around. He makes Yusei go to bed at, at least, a respectful time, maybe twelve a.m., and since Judai's internal clock is just as fucked up, he's almost always up before Yusei, which means he gets to make him stay in bed for at least two extra hours.

If Judai thought him gorgeous before, the first time he actually saw Yusei being well rested almost gave him a heart attack. Either way, it was very easy for him to decide that if he wasn't taking Yusei to Europe, he was taking him somewhere where he could relax and get that wonderful, very needed, beauty sleep. As much as he's proud of Yusei for being so smart and motivated and hardworking and a walking miracle, Judai likes him wrapped in blankets and snoring, preferably with a full tummy and space for Judai to wrap around him.

As it is, Judai almost doesn't want to wake up Yusei when they make it to their destination, a fenced off wooded area worked into a open field resort with a camping format, with only three buildings: one for staff and equipment, one for the spa services, and another one that leads into the hot springs. Guests are assigned a small area to camp, a tent, and from there they can do whatever they please, as long as they pay for it. Judai's been to quite a few places like this before, outside of Japan, but as they check in and get directed to their area, Yusei only half-awake, he finds that he feels much less left to his own devices, which is nice. He once came across a bear in Canada. The fence makes a big difference, even if it breaks some of the illusion of actual wilderness camping, *and* the hot spring allows tattoos, which is an immediate positive in Judai's mind.

Too distracted looking around and half-assedly writing a review of this place in his head, Judai doesn't really listen to what the employee showing them around is saying, up until he hears Yusei make a surprised noise.

"...always nice to have engaged couples or newlyweds coming over, since it makes the atmosphere all the more romantic—"

"So that's the kind of people you usually get as clients?" Yusei asks, and Judai feels the color drain from his face. Oh god.

"Oh, yes, definitely. Our advertisement certainly leads to it!" Their guide says, oblivious to Judai internally screaming at her to shut up. Yusei just nods, looking at the flier he was handed with a spark of interest in his eyes. Oh no. "I'll let you two settle in. If you feel like you've neglected to bring enough supplies, we'll be happy to figure things out for you, and you're welcome to join scheduled events. Have a good night!"

Yusei half-heartedly waves her off, and then he looks at Judai, pointing to something in his flier. "Why would people want mud baths?"

"I don't know, they even make you shower after it," Judai answers, in full auto pilot, and then snatches Yusei's flier from his hands, skimming it. Their guide was right, this looks much more honeymoon-ish than on their site. If he was unfair, he would give them a scathing criticism just for this. "Did she think we're engaged?"

Yusei takes the flier back, blushing at the question and clearing his throat. “I was too taken by surprise to correct her.”

Judai can't find it in himself to care past the next three seconds, during which he looks at Yusei's embarrassed expression and decides that he's actually flattered by that employee assuming they're either engaged or in their honeymoon. It's almost funny that someone thinks Judai will have the balls to get that far, or that Yusei will want him for that long, but it feels nice to slightly poke at the idea, if only for the sake of hope. He most definitely doesn't want to look at anyone else ever again after Yusei. They wouldn't compare, and he's only been with him for a few months.

“Well, guess that's fine,” Judai grins at Yusei and pulls him in by the hand, pecking his lips with a kiss. “Just hope that doesn't get blown out of proportion.”

Yusei smiles back at him, quiet but visibly relieved, and so they forget about it and start setting up their camp. Judai made sure they had everything they might need, from drinks and ice, to food and a wood stove, and enough blankets to get through the night and cushion their sleeping bags. He had to buy a lot of things brand new, including the stove, because Judai makes it a habit to not accumulate things by donating them since he makes his living travelling. It's embarrassing, to have the amount of money he does, and he always feels bad about it because he doesn't use it, so he just donates a lot, does a lot of things for free, makes sure he's always giving back as much as he gets, and hopes Jun doesn't scream about it later when he looks at what Judai's been using his earnings on, instead of *investing*.

Yusei protested Judai paying for all of it, but Judai had just let him look at his bank account and he seemed pretty convinced that it was alright, if only a bit hesitant. Yusei is just getting on his feet, making some good savings, so Judai isn't going to let him worry about how many expenses this trip will cause when it was his idea. He won't have him anything but relaxed and fluffy.

The tent was already set up for them, and bigger than Judai expected, but they don't spend more time than necessary in it before Judai's dragging

Yusei into the spa, after having him change into the bathrobes they were provided with the tent.

"I don't know," Yusei says, letting Judai lead him around by the hand, not complaining about how it looks like Judai's just pulling him in inconvenient directions for him to turn. "I don't think I want a stranger rubbing my naked body."

It gives Judai pause, as that dreadful possessive streak of him flares up. "No one will before I do, that's for fucking sure."

Yusei starts sputtering out noises and eventually gives up, staring at the back of Judai's head as if that will be enough to stop him from teasing him. Still, Yusei has a point; the flier spoke only of back and full body massages, which are practically always done naked, and if he's not comfortable with it, then Judai won't make him take them. He'll figure something else out.

"We'll get a manicure, then," Judai shrugs, and Yusei side eyes him. "C'mon, you have nice hands, from those gloves of yours. I think they do pedicures too— you need a foot rub."

"Do you usually let people rub you like that?"

Judai snorts, for once deciding to ignore how poorly phrased that is. "Oh, man, you don't know what you're missing."

Yusei half-heartedly agrees, but by the time he's actually getting his nails cleaned and filed, his feet rubbed and massaged, he looks like he doesn't want to leave. Yusei got attended to by an older lady, sweet as candy, who managed to make him comfortable enough to relax his shoulders and close his eyes, and Judai spent most of his own time listening to them speak instead of making conversation with his own service guy, who picks this *exact* moment to distract him.

"You have very strong hands, Yuki-san," he says, to which Judai actually looks at him. He's a nice looking fella, whose name tag reads Rio, and he doesn't seem fazed by the amount of filth under his nails. Nice guy, for sure. "You work out?"

Huh. Maybe too nice. "Ah, I just travel a lot, under any circumstances, so I figured I should keep myself healthy to be able to take it."

"I see. That must be quite the feat," Rio smiles at him, looking genuinely interested, and doesn't say anything for a few more minutes, focusing on his work. Judai thinks he won't say much more, but catches Rio hesitating, so he keeps his eyes on him, willing to listen. "Say, Yuki-san, if you don't mind me asking, is it worth it to travel that much?"

The question catches Judai unprepared, so he gapes like a fish for a few seconds. For a moment, Judai thinks he's being insulted or judged, but Rio looks too nervous to have the balls to do something like that to a client, moving on from cleaning his nails to filing them in expectant silence, and Rio's aura doesn't give off any odd vibes— just genuine curiosity.

Well, Judai was worried for a moment that he was being flirted with, but he's glad that's not the case. "Yeah. I think it is. You should give it a try, you know. There's a lot to see out there, and it never gets old."

Rio nods and smiles, a bit wobbly. "I'll consider it."

Judai sighs in satisfaction and turns his head back to look at Yusei, but he finds himself being stared at by him already, the softest smile on his lips. Judai curves his lips out into a kiss, shooting it at him with a wink, and Yusei closes his eyes with it once more, relaxing even further against his chair. By the time they're done, it's about dark enough for them to have dinner, so Judai gets the woodstove running as Yusei sorts out their food, going for meat and grilled veggies.

"That was nice," Yusei comments over the sound of the meat sizzling, watching Judai poke at it from his seat beside him. They made a campfire, in order to light up the night a little more, and the flames dance in his eyes, making them stand out more than they already do, gorgeous as ever. "My feet feel nice."

"Imagine what that would do to your back," Judai chuckles, turns over the veggies, and swallows some of the drool provoked by his hunger, chopsticks itching to get food into his mouth. He should have brought more

snacks. "We can go into the hot springs in a bit, after eating. It'll get you warm and loose."

His wording must have been *funny*, to say the least, because Yusei snorts and brings his knees up to his chin, so he can lean against them and hide most of his expression. Judai almost wants to poke his cheeks with the chopsticks just to see if he's puffing them up for real.

"I don't think I've been to a hot spring... in years. I think I was a child, the last time," Yusei hums, tilting his head to the side. "I've mostly forgotten the protocol."

"Well, can't say I've been to one in a while either. Most of them don't like tattoos," Judai scrunches up his nose, but offers Yusei a grin. "The rules will be written out anyways."

Yusei stares at Judai, nodding. "I don't think I've properly seen your tattoo."

Well, Judai's selfishly made sure of that. It's not that he doesn't want Yusei to know, he just struggles to explain this— another thing that comes with the package he is, but one that Yusei hasn't gotten to unwrap yet. It's alright, though, because Judai knows Yusei won't push, not like his friends did when they found out about the tattoo, merely a year after their highschool graduation. Yusei will ask, in that cautious way he does, and he'll take whatever answer Judai gives him, elaborate or not.

"I'll show you," Judai promises, and hesitates on turning the meat around, but it looks dark enough. He hopes they nailed it with the salt. "It's just... a little personal. But I should probably tell you about it, or it might get weirder the longer I sleep in your bed."

"You say that as if it's not already weird that you treat *me* like a teddy bear," Yusei refutes, not missing a beat, and Judai answers by rolling his eyes, handing him a pair of chopsticks and turning off the stove, piling food on their plates so they can sit on the ground around their campfire. He's starving.

"It's not my fault you're cuddly," Judai reaches over once they sit, and grabs Yusei's left cheek between his fingers, pinching him. "Look at you. You're made to be loved."

It might be the fire, but Yusei's face is really red. It makes Judai giddy., that he's so easy to tease, if you know where to aim.

They eat mostly in silence, but for the crackling of the fire and the distant buzz of people around, having dinner themselves, of nature being their company. Judai is usually a talker during meals, since he eats too fast for his own good, and way too often forgets that he shouldn't speak with his mouth open, but he likes the quiet around Yusei. It's comforting and light, not at all making him feel like he needs to start a conversation, and it contrasts the way Judai usually eats frantically, loudly, either because he dislikes eating alone and he wants it to be over with, because he's running late to something, or because someone's with him, sharing the meal.

Yusei's silences feel sacred instead, like Judai's been running all day and just now took a second to breathe. He can tell that Yusei knows he needs these moments with him, knows how comforting Judai finds it to just *bask* in his light for a few minutes, that he's the only one he can find them with, and Judai loves him for it, for understanding Judai's not always going to be the one-thousand percent that people expect him to be. Love, such a big word, but Yusei sure makes Judai want to scream it, if only to himself.

But still, Judai won't deny a conversation— especially if it's with Yusei.

"Do you ever wonder where we'd be, if we hadn't met?" Yusei asks, in between bites, their food almost done. The question doesn't really catch Judai by surprise, not really, since Yusei has a rather tender approach to it with his voice, but it is a rather huge question. "Who we'd be with?"

"I'd be here, maybe, but alone," Judai shakes his head, scoots over so his right knee is touching Yusei's, his elbow nudging his side. "I'd be at least ninety-five percent less happy, that's for sure."

Yusei smiles at this, but stares at his plate, taking another bite of his meat before speaking. "I'd probably be going stir crazy, or studying. By myself, if

I had to guess."

"You sell yourself short," Judai finishes his plate with a satisfied sigh, and stands up to go over to their cooler, bringing out two beers, opening them before handing one to Yusei and sitting down, his empty cardboard plate thrown in their trash bag. "If I hadn't come around when I did, someone would have surely snatched you, like the gorgeous catch you are— Didn't Aki try, after all?"

"Aki thought she had a crush on me because Sherry was always hanging out with me when she was still in school," Yusei snorts at the memory, shrugging, but it turns into a wince at the end. "The kiss was a bit much, though."

Judai wraps his arm around Yusei's shoulders, dramatically leaning against him. "I'm so jealous. She stole your first kiss from me."

"You were my first real kiss, though," Yusei says, in that simple way he does, and Judai brings him in, almost making him spill his drink, to press his lips against his. He doesn't make it a short kiss, either, letting their lips slide together slowly for several seconds before teasingly licking into his mouth, sucking his bottom lip, pulling back just as Yusei tries to lean into the kiss even more. They make eye contact and Yusei blinks as if dazed, his mouth hanging open, shiny with spit. Judai should take a picture of this expression he makes someday. "Yeah... like... like that."

"Like that?" Judai repeats, smirking, unable to resist the clownery, and ignores the eye-roll it gets him, pointing at Yusei's food. "You gonna eat that, or am I too distracting?"

Yusei rolls his eyes, but his blush is clear as day, and then he pointedly finishes his food, taking a few sips of his beer to help it down, before speaking again. "I think you're the one that wouldn't be alone, though."

"What? Have you met me?" Judai smirks at Yusei, but Yusei looks dead serious, which Judai doesn't like. "Oi, whatcha' thinking about?"

"I've met you," Yusei whispers, leaning his weight against Judai like he did many nights ago, during that sleepover, but it's more confident, not fueled by alcohol, more intimate in the way his chin comes to rest over his shoulder. "And you're wonderful. I'm the one that would have missed out on you, and would be less happy than I am."

"You..." Judai sighs, struggling not to either break out into tears or into laughter. God, Yusei really makes him so happy he could cry. "You say the dumbest shit."

Yusei frowns. "I thought it was romantic."

"It is," Judai agrees with a nod, and promptly brings Yusei in for another kiss, just as deep as the last one and a little longer, one of his hands coming to hold Yusei's chin so Judai can lick into his mouth better, in the way that makes Yusei tremble and hold on to Judai's shirt like a lifeline. Yusei has that intense look in his eye when they break apart, the one that could dry up oceans out of thirst. He's obsessed with it. "Maybe we should just both agree we're happier together."

Yusei blinks in confusion, then their conversation comes back to him slowly, making him nod along, licking his lips. "Yeah. We are."

Judai pecks his forehead. "Hot spring?"

It's almost closing time for the hot springs, it turns out, only an hour or so left before it, but the staff allows them in just the same, reminding them of the rules before giving each of them a locker key for their clothes. They haven't actually showered or bathed together before, and a hot spring is hardly the same as those things, but Judai sees Yusei making a knot of his towel like a ship depends on it not to sink, and can't help but chuckle to himself.

Judai's never been shy about nudity. Not when he was in the Academy, not when he started travelling around Japan, and then the continent, and then the world, but he understands the vulnerability of it for other people, raised under different circumstances. Yusei lived a normal life up until he was around ten, and it got flipped upside down, he moved cities, then he found

himself in the remnants of the old Domino, trying to survive. Judai can see how someone that lived like that for so long would use clothing as armor, how fabric against skin would be comforting, and he'll respect it as such.

Yusei does sleep in his underwear, more often than not, so Judai won't see anything he hasn't seen and appreciated and complimented before— but, hot springs are different from that, too. Judai blames the male bonding traditions.

Still, it's not awkward. They settle into the water with simultaneous sighs, and don't speak for a few minutes as they soak, sitting side by side. Judai goes as far as to dunk himself under the water for a few seconds, and Yusei's staring at the spot under which he disappeared, when he comes up again, his expression full of fondness.

"What, did I lose my towel?" Judai asks, just to be a jackass, and Yusei retaliates by trying to dunk him under the water himself, pushing him into the deeper parts of the hot spring. "Hey, watch the manhandling!"

"You manhandle me all the time," Yusei says, but lets go of him and swims back to the edge, ignoring Judai following after him and only half-heartedly fighting him off when Judai wraps an arm around his waist, sitting close together. "Like this, actually."

"You love it," Judai mumbles, because he sees the expression Yusei makes when Judai leads him around when they're making out, when he pulls him into hugs and kisses and just generally, really. Yusei's the one that needs glasses, not him, because he's blind to his own cues, and the rush of additional color rushing to his cheek, that isn't because of the water, proves him right. "Honestly, I would kiss you right now if it didn't end up with us being kicked out of the hot spring for public indecency."

"We're the only ones here," Yusei points out, as if he's the kind of guy that risks that. Seemingly realizing the implications of his words, though, Yusei is quick to correct himself. "Not that it makes a difference, of course."

"Sure thing," Judai leans in and pecks his nose. "There, it's settled."

Yusei hums and, like he's done a few times before, leans down to rest his head over Judai's shoulder, his nose going right into the crook of his neck. It's a rather curious thing he does, since he has to bend his back in order to reach, and it reminds Judai of how he sleeps tightly curled in, used to sharing beds and letting other people have more space than him, of how he hunches over himself, unconsciously, when no one's watching, because he wants to go under the radar. So Judai doesn't question why he does this; he's just glad he can find this comfort in him.

One of Yusei's hands comes up, shy in its slowness, to rest over Judai's chest, over his tattoo, fingers tracing the edges in curiosity. Yusei says nothing, and Judai appreciates the simplicity of his question, how they don't need words for it. Judai promised, but he can back down if he wants. He won't.

"It's a name," he starts, letting the words out in a whisper, ignoring the rabbiting of his heartbeat when Yusei's hand freezes. "It's not what you would assume, though— I'm not stupid enough to tattoo an ex's name, you know."

"I didn't think you were," Yusei goes back to tracing it, his head not moving, his voice light. He's not shocked yet. "I'm just wondering how I didn't realize it was a name all along."

"It's not a common name, to be fair," Judai chuckles, nostalgia threatening to hit him full force, and takes a deep breath afterwards in order to calm down. It's been so long now— he's been living longer by himself than he ever did with them, and it still hurts to talk about it. "It's... it's my sibling's name. Yubel."

"You have a sibling?" Yusei's voice is colored with surprise, but it's not bad. It's a little spooked, since he probably didn't expect it to be something like this, a literal biological connection strong enough for him to mark his skin with it, but it's the kind of shock that lasts a few seconds and then fades straight out into acceptance.

This next part is always the hardest, though. His voice doesn't break as he says it, which is a first. "Well, I had one. Yubel passed away when I was

seven."

Yusei sits up, and looks at Judai straight in the eye. There's no pity there, no judgement, none of the anger Judai's faced when he's told people about this only months if not *years* into knowing them, when how much it affects him to this day comes up. Yusei understands this, at the very least, this deepest kind of loss— and it's something Judai will never take for granted.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Yusei asks, cautious, open. Ready to listen if Judai wants to, ready to change the subject if not.

"There's not much to tell, really. Parents didn't really care enough to be around, so it was just us. Then there was a freak accident and..." Judai trails off, blinking away tears, staring at Yusei's face as if to get a grip on his emotions. He basks in him, his shiny, light, calming aura, and he's able to continue. "...well, I know now it wasn't my fault, but it felt like it for a long time. And when I started travelling, I just walked by this tattoo shop, I think in America, and... got a tattoo."

Yusei looks about ready to cry with him, and honestly, Judai wouldn't be against it. "Seems like you carried that with you for a long time."

Judai grimaces. "I guess so. The tattoo helped, but, well. That's not the weird part."

"There's a weird part to this?"

"I have dreams, sometimes," Judai licks his lips, sighing, letting the words out in a rush. This part, it's always better to get it over with rather than delay it. "I don't know how real they are, but they feel very... present. And I can never remember the details, I just know I was talking to Yubel about something, and that something might come up over the next month or week or day and I'll just... know about it. Details I shouldn't know. And I've been told I talk in my sleep during these dreams, so it's something you should probably know about, before I freak you out."

Yusei remains quiet after Judai's rather frantic explanation, and he wonders if he can feel how fast his heart is beating right now. He's not scared of

rejection, not really— Yusei is too open minded to just slap Judai with a '*you're insane*' label, but it's still terrifying to talk about this. There are other things that come with the dreams, of course, but Judai can't put a name to them. He just knows people shine, and sometimes he can tell they're thinking about something, and he's always been unsure of whether that's him being observant or something else. It's part of the reason he approached Yusei that night, four, five years ago; his shining presence was dramatically different from anyone else's around.

He doesn't want to add it on top of the dreams, tonight.

"Were you worried I would react badly to this?" Yusei asks, sitting up a little so he can look at Judai in the eye, both of them so close together that Judai can feel his breath against his lips.

"Not really, no," Judai brings a hand up to run across Yusei's cheek, tracing that faded scar over his skin, almost invisible but for the slight change in texture. "It probably isn't that hard to comprehend, but child therapists didn't take well to it after Yubel, well... died."

Yusei's eyes narrow as if he wants to say something rather rude about that, but he keeps it down, leaning his face into Judai's hand. "I don't think it's weird. Some things can't be explained."

"I'm surprised you believe me at all," Judai snorts and helplessly drops a kiss over Yusei's lips, using all his self-control to keep it short and chaste. "You break everything down so easily."

"Of course I believe you, Judai. I would be a fool if I didn't trust everything that comes out of your mouth by now," Yusei rolls his eyes as if Judai's somehow being silly, and there it comes again, that feeling like he's between laughing and crying. "You're honest to a fault, and, to be honest, a little magical."

"Pot, meet kettle," Judai chuckles. "God, I'm obsessed with you."

For once, Yusei's reaction is not to huff as if Judai's telling a bad joke. Instead, he leans in and rubs their noses together, like a slowed down

eskimo kiss, and something in Judai's chest squeezes, in an odd mix of pain and love.

They focus on soaking after that, and Judai even gets to rub Yusei's back, though it doesn't escalate into a full massage. It's a shame, really, because Judai knows that Yusei's body is a sanctuary of hurt, the amount of effort he puts into his work showing in how stiff he gets when he's sitting for too long, from the way he tries to hide winces when he raises his arms, and how he pretends laying on his back, relaxed, isn't the best thing that happens to him all day. Still, Judai won't push him into getting a massage in the spa if he doesn't want one. He'll just have to take care of it himself.

The vapor coming off the hot spring seems to free up Judai's lungs, making it easier to breathe, but it's possible that he's just glad to have told Yusei about Yubel, at last. Yusei makes it so easy to trust him, it's no wonder everyone is so at ease around him. When Judai met Jack, he thought he would never get him to relax around him, but Yusei had only needed to send him a look before he mellowed out to Judai, in that strange, almost tsundere way of his.

They go to bed straight from the spring, the three hours road trip catching up to them. Yusei seems about dead on his feet, now that the hot water has loosened him completely, blinking slowly as if he might fall asleep where he stands, and Judai's actually seen him do that a couple of times, so he keeps an arm around his waist as they walk back to their campsite, guiding Yusei's arm around his shoulders. He allows Judai to carry most of his weight, his head turned upwards to look at the sky, a soft smile helping the moon paint a peaceful expression over his features.

"It's pretty out here," he says, voice low and sweet. Judai could probably hear it in replay in his ears for the rest of his life, and wouldn't be tired of it. "You picked a good place."

"Well, I'd be bad at my job *and* at being your boyfriend if I hadn't," Judai nudges his hip with his own, at the risk of making them trip, and Yusei lets out the most unexpected laugh from his lips, carefree and making the corners of his eyes wrinkle. "Yuu-chan, you're so pretty."

Yusei, honest to God, *giggles*, his cheeks pink. “You’re pretty handsome yourself, Judai-san.”

Something in Judai shifts, and it makes him want to push Yusei against the nearest surface and kiss him silly. And maybe other things, but thinking about it too hard will just jinx it. “I’m like an ugly monkey when I’m standing next to you.”

Yusei shoots him what Judai calls the ‘*mom side eye*’, because he looks like the moms around the world he’s seen in public when their children are about to say or do something stupid.

“You’re handsome,” Yusei repeats, looking very intently at Judai. The effect would be better if he wasn’t hanging on to him for dear life. “Your eyes are the prettiest thing I’ve ever seen, with that stain and the shade. And you look like you’re not going to age a day, too. You’re like the sun, I could stare at you for hours until I’m blind.”

“Well, fuck,” Judai wheezes out, his face heating, almost unbearably so. “Did you take a creative writing class and didn’t tell me about it, or what?”

Yusei pulls him in for a kiss, still wearing that soft smile. “Just say thank you.”

“You’re still the prettiest,” Judai mumbles, lips brushing against Yusei, and ignores the sounds of protest that escapes him when he pulls back, hurrying their pace. “C’mon, you must be tired.”

“Am not,” Yusei refutes, but not ten minutes later, when they’re settling into their pajamas, he’s yawning and rubbing his eyes, trying to stay awake.

Foolishly, Judai tricked himself into thinking that they would actually need two sleeping bags, but he ends up dragging Yusei’s right next to him so they can leave both of them open and share a blanket above them, like the sucker he is for having Yusei in his arms. Yusei smiles at this, and thankfully doesn’t call out Judai— but he’s the one that buries his face in his neck and brings their bodies as close together as possible, the one that holds on so tight Judai struggles to breathe for a few seconds. He’s glad Yusei keeps

meeting him in the middle, or Judai would probably already have a broken heart.

They won't be staying for longer than three days. Judai wishes they could have the full week, but he had to pull through a few contacts to even get them this reservation, since this place was absolutely packed already. He doesn't mind it that much, but Yusei deserves more time away from the chaos of New Domino. Judai might take him camping after this, for real, or just fly him to Europe after all. Whatever happens after they get to the city.

They spend the morning of their second day hiking out with a group, enjoying the wilderness, and then take yet another soak in the hot springs after having lunch, chatting with other campers. They get mistaken as an engaged couple at least three times throughout the day, and by that point Judai just starts introducing them as such, much to Yusei's embarrassment, ignoring how it makes his heart flutter. He hopes this won't spread and reach people in the tourism industry, because then there might be some explanations he will owe to Jun and all of his friends, really, but for now, Judai just enjoys turning Yusei into a mess.

He somehow manages to rope Yusei into yoga, which he regrets, because watching Yusei willingly bend this way and that is not good for his heart. They get into group activities afterwards, which Yusei is surprisingly open to try, which mostly means beating other people at tabletop games. Judai managed a rather crushing win at chess against an old lady who pinched his cheeks but was most definitely planning her revenge, and Yusei somehow got pulled by a few children into making flower crowns. Then Duel Monsters cards were pulled out of bags, a mini-tournament was announced, and Judai watched Yusei pout, flower crown over his hair, about how he hadn't thought to bring his cards over to the trip, once Judai was crowned champion.

"I would have beaten you," Yusei side eyes Judai, with that look that screams he wants to cause trouble. It immediately has Judai all over him, going '*you think so, punk?*', and pushing him onto their sleeping bags, very pleasantly stuck between Yusei's firm, juicy thighs. "Most definitely."

“That sounds like you’re bluffing,” Judai leans in to steal a kiss, long and heated, tasting of fresh cherries and wine from the bottle the staff gave him as a prize. When he pulls back, Yusei’s lost the cocky look in his eye, and it’s now being replaced by blown pupils, wide eyes, panting breaths. “Got something to defend yourself with, babe?”

Yusei swallows, eyelids fluttering. “I can admit defeat, from time to time.”

Judai has very bad self-control, but Yusei is high-key drunk and falls asleep barely minutes after saying that, while Judai kisses his neck. Yusei's taken to wearing shirts to bed for this trip, because of the temperature dropping at night, and Judai misses the sight of his bare chest rather deeply. Despite its loss, it's not the only thing Judai stares at when Yusei falls asleep before him; he often can't help but look at his sleeping face, relaxed and loose, lacking any of the nobleness of Yusei when he's awake and revealing the softness at his core, giving origin to his kind heart. Judai loves to see him, and loves to lean in and whisper sweet things into his ear, so he can feel loved all throughout the night in his dreams.

Their third and final day is a little more relaxed. They go fishing at a nearby lake, but are too distracted having an argument over whether milk should actually be served at bars or not to catch anything, at which point Judai manages to drag Yusei into doing aerobics, which quickly escalates into them being kicked out because Yusei has two left feet and Judai can't help but keep giggling at it. Yusei tries to be angry at him, avoiding kisses, so Judai drags him into their tent and goes about teaching him how to ballroom dance.

He's not any better at it, but he tries, and it gives Judai an excuse to fondle him. It's worth getting his feet stepped on.

It's when the sun's setting, after an early dinner and many attempts at implying Yusei should at least try the special baths and just as many unsure sounds, that Judai grabs Yusei and pushes him against the sleeping bags, on his stomach, sitting over his butt and making him stay down.

"This seems a little unnecessary," Yusei says, as Judai throws the shirt Yusei was wearing off to the side, just to reach for the bottle of lotion he packed

just in case, pouring a nice amount, and rubbing it between his hands to warm it up before starting. "Really, I'm fine..."

"You, sir, have no say in this," Judai shakes his head, sighing like a disappointed parent. "You'll thank me by the end of this."

"I really don't— *ack!*" Yusei jumps at the contact of Judai's hands over his shoulders, almost jostling him off. Looks like he didn't warm up enough, but he is not sorry about it. "It's cold— *oh god Judai!*"

Yusei's protests are effectively shut up by Judai's hands kneading into his shoulders, thumbs digging into the balls of tension in his back. He's extremely stiff, his muscles protesting under the pressure he's exposing them to, and Yusei makes little noises of pain throughout all of it, his hands balling into fists over the sheets.

"Man up, babe," Judai smiles, leaning down to drop a kiss on the back of his head, barely avoiding his hair spikes "I'll make you feel *crazy* good."

Yusei only answers with a grunt, followed by a yelp when Judai digs harder, which is better than nothing. Judai focuses on the left side of Yusei's back first, digging his thumbs around for knots and undoing the ones he finds. He has numerous; some are really small, but several are big, and require him to use his elbow to fully get them out. By the time he's gotten rid of the fourth knot, Yusei's relaxed into the sleeping bags, not really wincing in pain anymore, his skin broken out in goosebumps. As he moves towards the right side of his back, he even starts letting out little hums of pleasure, and a whole moan when Judai works his thumbs over his spine, knob by knob, the sound unrestrained and a little out of it.

"Feeling good yet?" Judai asks, mostly just to tease, but Yusei gives a rather affirmative, enthusiastic response, nodding and groaning in time with Judai pressing against a particularly stubborn knot right under his shoulder blade. "You're doing great, babe. I told you I'd be good for you."

Yusei makes a happy noise as a response, so Judai focuses back on his work. It gets distracting, honestly, because Yusei keeps moaning, fully immersed, his body starting to feel like Judai's sitting over jelly. He gets

especially loud when Judai reaches the knots sitting at the small of his back, even going so far as to arch his back and whine, completely gone in the feeling.

It makes it hard for Judai to focus, too easy for him to fantasize. He slides down on Yusei's butt to sit over his thighs, watches as the movement reveals the start of his butt because his boxers dragged down, and Judai bites his lip in thought, considering the sight, his hands moving lower to start kneading at that, too. Yusei shivers with it, and Judai's mind is definitely going into places way too dirty for a simple massage, so he stops, letting out a whistle. Leaning over Yusei, Judai rests his chin over his shoulder, holding back his own trembling when he realizes how hard Yusei's breathing, how hard he's trying to hide his face in the pillow under it.

Judai brings a hand to run through Yusei's hair, scratching at the back of his scalp, delighting internally at the way Yusei lets out a sound very close to a mewl. "Was that good?"

Yusei lifts his face from the pillow and turns his head to look at Judai, taking him completely by surprise with his expression. He's redder than he's ever seen him, unless his eyes and their lamp are playing tricks on him, and there is an almost desperate edge to his gaze, eyes shining with energy and heat.

"Uh," Judai says, cursing the sudden loss of his rather inconvenient eloquence. It really only shows up when he needs to *babble* about nothing at all. "You alright there, babe?"

Yusei narrows his eyes at him, almost accusingly, and Judai wonders if he did something wrong for about five seconds before Yusei's turning his body and pushing him off, only to climb onto his lap and lock their lips together. Judai realizes several things very quickly. First, and most importantly, Yusei is very obviously hard against him, poking at his belly. Second, Yusei is shaking, his hands holding on to the edge of Judai's shirt for life. And third, Judai's just sitting there, like a buffoon, instead of doing anything.

It's quickly amendable, though. His hands move on their own, arms wrapping around Yusei's waist to keep him still, steady, and close, while he

tilts his chin upwards and meets Yusei's mouth better, licking at his lips with no hesitation, something inside him twisting with giddiness at how willingly Yusei opens his mouth and lets him in, almost with abandon.

Judai could kiss Yusei for days on end and he'd never get tired. There's always something thrilling about it; Yusei's mouth is always sweet and soft and pliant, his body unconsciously begging for more in how his breath trembles, his thighs squeeze his sides, how he doesn't know what to do with his hands other than *holding on*, as if for once he's the one sitting at the back of his bike, instead of at the front.

It's intoxicating and addictive, admittedly one of the things Judai's come to miss the most while being away. There's just no rush comparable to how Yusei doesn't shy away from the rather obscene amount of saliva they're exchanging, and how he *welcomes* Judai's thorough exploration of his mouth. There's no high like Yusei's chest fluttering against him and the feeling of pushing Yusei down, back against the sleeping bags, his bulky body turned into melted jelly and shivery skin. Judai moves on to his neck, and this time Yusei tilts his head to the side to give him more space, instead of falling asleep. He gasps with the first brush of teeth, and moans when Judai finds his way down to a nipple, which he licks with entirely too much gusto when he realizes how much Yusei likes it, to the point in which he arches his back.

Judai takes a second to breathe, though, sitting up, Yusei's legs wrapped around his waist as if he's his last connection to awareness. Their eyes meet, heavy with lust, and Judai wasn't even hard or *that* turned on about five minutes ago, but Yusei truly is a speed racer. Gets him going like nothing else.

"Is this alright?" Judai asks, just to be sure, wincing at the roughness of his voice, at the authoritarian ring of it. He needs to tone it down a little, though he notices Yusei biting his lip, before mumbling out a very eager '*yes, of course*'. "What do you want?"

At this, Yusei hesitates, his eyes widening, and Judai's hit with the memory of how inexperienced he is, how he had no need or desire to do this with anyone before they met, and he feels bad about it only up until he takes a

second, closer look at Yusei, at how his body screams in need within the curve of his back and the goosebumps, his pink nipples and lips, his eyes raw with want. Well, Judai's not gonna cockblock him. Not when he looks like that, but simply doesn't know enough about this to ask for anything. Leaning in, Judai drops the softest, most reassuring kiss he's capable of against his forehead, shooting him his best smile.

"I got you, baby."

Judai won't remove more clothes. He doesn't think he'd be able to actually see all of Yusei naked and be able to keep this nice and simple yet pleasant, and he really, really wants to take his time with Yusei. This trip was most definitely a great idea, considering he had no idea if they were even *there*, at a stage in which they could start getting intimate, before it. Maybe they just needed to be by themselves, in order for it to happen, instead of sharing a wall with two other people, but Judai's glad it's been four months and not a week.

So, he does what every gentleman would do and runs his hands down Yusei's chest, playing with a nipple and watching him— watching him *wince*.

"This isn't good?" He asks, and Yusei immediately shakes his head no, chest rising up as if to meet his hands again. "I'm gonna need an honest verbal response here, darling."

Yusei looks away and clears his throat, visibly swallowing. His voice is barely above a whisper, embarrassed and tight. "...it's good. I like it."

Judai does it again, this time running his nails over the skin around Yusei's nipples before rolling on of them with his thumb, watching him wince again — but he catches this time, the heavy exhale of breath, the slight helpless tilt of Yusei's head to the side, and Judai realizes that he's just overwhelmed about how to react to it, liking it but overthinking it.

Well, he'll get rid of any thoughts in no time. "If I feel you thinking too hard about this, unless you're begging to come, I will stop."

Yusei's eyes snap to his, wide, his mouth falling open at Judai's tone, processing the ultimatum. "What—"

Judai caresses Yusei's chest and drifts his hand down to his crotch, pressing one of them against the bulge in his underwear while the other strays to his hip, already preparing to keep him still. It shuts him up, makes him squeeze his eyes shut and break out into a high-pitched moan, the kind one would think Yusei would not be capable of. Judai is immediately in love with it, and leans down to capture it with his tongue, licking into Yusei's mouth with little finesse but all the eagerness of his cock throbbing. He rubs his palm against the outline of Yusei's cock, so slow it's practically teasing, which makes Yusei break the kiss to bury his face in Judai's neck, panting and holding onto the back of his shirt so tightly that Judai fears a sudden movement might make it break.

He struggles to keep his mouth shut and his thoughts grounded. He's always been a talker during sex, too, and that's gotten him mixed reviews of his performance as a lover. Judai is nothing if not generous in bed—he gets off the way Yusei's hips twitch upwards to rub harder against his hand, the way his whole body shakes with it, almost as much as he could get off with a handjob or a blowjob, but he feels like running his mouth right now about exactly how much he wants to turn Yusei into putty would be a little overwhelming, to say the least. So, Judai bites his tongue and breathes heavily, hand squeezing Yusei's hip and the other moving to lower the hem of Yusei's underwear, fingers tickling skin, brushing against the source of Yusei's current needs.

"Judai," Yusei pants out, his legs wrapping around him even harder. It gives Judai all thought of filthy thoughts that he can't entertain right now, since they're ridiculously unprepared for sex as it is. Yusei's voice rings desperate, breathy, and tight, lips brushing over Judai's neck, like he's struggling not to let out any sounds that aren't logical words. "God, just touch me, *please*."

"Patience," Judai reiterates, but moves his hand further in, eager to see how Yusei adapts to this. He grabs his cock without hesitation, steady and firm, unmoving, and smirks to himself when Yusei almost chokes on a gasp, his

body coiling as if unable to understand what it's supposed to do about this. "Relax, I'm just going to make you feel good."

"You've barely touched me and I'm already—" Yusei takes in a deep breath, unable to continue, but his body doesn't get any less stiff, anticipation keeping him tight. It sends a delicious thrill down Judai's spine, to know he's rendered to this with barely a few kisses and teasing touches, and it makes him push Yusei down, the hand on his hip moving to his chest, so he can look at his face.

Yusei looks innocent, under this light. Doe eyes, like pretty jewels, his lips almost bloody red, his cheeks and neck and chest flushed, like he's slowly overheating. It makes Judai want to eat him up, tear him apart bit by bit so he can find all the places that make Yusei sing to the point of his voice breaking, so he doesn't stare for long, leaning down to bite marks into his skin, over his neck and collarbones and shoulders and chest, hoping they bruise. Yusei lets out the weakest moan through his lips, on the edge of needy, and it makes Judai's blood pump even faster, his cock throbbing and seeking friction.

He's always been a little possessive, if Judai says so himself, and it drives him insane to feel like Yusei wants and needs *him*, that he's accidentally saved himself for the reaping, for him. As an experiment, Judai tightens his grip on Yusei's cock, the tiniest bit, and he's rewarded with a whine, canting hips, precome dripping over his hand in generous amounts. It makes him smile, even as he sucks spots into Yusei's skin, in places that make him tense up or shiver, catching him with rapture, so he takes pity on him and finally runs his thumb over the head of his dick, pressing just-so over his slit, at the same time he strokes upwards.

"Ahhh!" Yusei lets out a long sound that disturbs the otherwise quiet of their tent, of nature sleeping, filled with helplessness and desire, mixed with a moan, and then lets go of Judai's shirt with one of his hands, just to bring it to his mouth to cover it. Judai disapproves of the gesture, but they *are* in what could be considered a public space. He will forgive it for now, but he won't take any of that in the future. He wants to memorize whatever sounds Yusei makes, to get him through nights alone in cold hotel rooms, along with all his memories of him, of the light he is, in the future.

Judai sighs, decides that this was enough teasing, stroking Yusei's cock downwards only to twist his hand on the way up, which makes his hips twitch, unable to resist the intensity of it.

"Go with your gut," Judai whispers against Yusei's jaw, trying to be reassuring. "Focus on feeling good."

"I... fuck," Yusei pauses for a few seconds to moan, noises coming through his palm even though he tries to keep them down, too distracted by Judai speeding up and trying out different things to be able to speak. His back arches off the sleeping bags when Judai squeezes the head of his cock while going upwards, and when he pairs it with a quick thumbing of his slit, a mewl startles out of him, his hips openly thrusting upwards. Judai repeats the motion with a few minor changes here and there to speed and pressure, short of fascinated by how Yusei seems to be biting the back of his hand in order to keep quiet now, but the feeling of a hand pulling at his hair and sending heat down his spine forces him to pay attention to what he's trying to say. "Judai... *ah!* Fuck, Judai, hold, just... hold on, I'm—I'm too close —"

"That's good," Judai hums, smiling, mostly to himself, but also at how absolutely adorable Yusei sounds like this, his voice tiny and devoid of the coolness that usually commands his presence. He drags his lips over his neck, biting his way upwards and nudging his hand away with his nose to land on his lips, sucking the bottom one into his mouth and then licking his way inside, only to further suck on his tongue. Yusei's soaked with precome now, twitching every few seconds, and Judai's almost proud of it.

Yusei pulls at his hair again, so Judai breaks away from him, staring down at his face, seeing him squeezing his eyes shut. He slows down his pace just to allow him to speak somewhat coherently.

"I want you..." Yusei mumbles, and Judai's brain immediately panics, at the same time his cock twitches, reminding him exactly how interested he's in that idea. "Judai, I want you."

Judai has to swallow and clench his jaw, reminding himself that Yusei knows very little and he's probably not saying what Judai's dick believes

he's saying, but still—he won't deny a request like this. "Yes. Yes, of course."

He scrambles to straighten up, sitting over his calves and leaning on his toes for balance, keeping Yusei's legs over his thighs as he pulls himself out of his pajamas and his underwear, almost hissing at how cold it feels and how hard he is. Yusei watches with half-lidded eyes, fixed on his cock, and Judai pretends that he didn't notice hunger in them, for the sake of not having a heart attack. He hurries to lean back over Yusei's body, their crotches together, using an elbow against the sleeping bags for balance, next to Yusei's head, and his free hand to line themselves up. Yusei's short of hyperventilating by the time Judai manages to wrap his hand somewhat comfortably around both of their dicks, and shivers when Judai experimentally presses his hips down, skin dragging against skin, safely kept inside his hand.

"*Fuck*," Judai sighs, pleasure coating the word, his voice almost breaking at the end. Yusei moans in agreement, and hesitantly tilts his hips upwards, his hand finding itself back against his mouth to keep his noises in. As it is, Judai just finds himself cursing in what he's pretty sure might be French, maybe Italian, but he doesn't really care to pay attention, instead returning the gesture with a proper thrust, a thrust that rocks their bodies and makes him feel like his skin isn't enough to contain him, like a string pulled tight.

Judai hasn't rutted against someone like this in ages, and the fact that it is *Yusei*, well, he could very easily come in his pants within the next twenty-seconds, if he isn't careful. Yusei's body attracts him like a siren's call, so he is helpless to how his hips develop a mind of their own and set a pace, faster and rougher than he'd like to be for Yusei's sake, but too good to pull back from. He tries to move his hand along, to give them both even more stimulation, but Yusei's gasping breaths and stifled moans, the way he pulls Judai down so he can press his forehead over his shoulder, distract him too much for him to show any of the experience he has with this. It's really like he's back at being a teenager, except he's one hell of a lot more confident on how he's going to exploit the fuck out of everything he's learning at a later date.

Judai presses his hips down and rotates them, keeping their bodies flushed together and momentarily slowing their pace, only to rub his hand across their lengths, biting his lip and closing his eyes, allowing himself to bask in Yusei's feel and smell and sound. He's sweating to the point in which he feels it dripping down his chest, his crazed heartbeat background noise to his ears as they prefer to focus on Yusei, his cock achingly hard and ready for relief. Yusei is growing tense under him again, openly shaking, and Judai takes it as a sign that he's close, deciding to speed up once more. It's too good; he can't help but moan rather loudly at the tingle that runs down his spine, and words slip from his lips without his full awareness.

"Fucking hell, you're so hot," he says, voice husky and raw, shivering as Yusei starts falling out of rhythm and gets louder, his hand barely enough now to keep him down, too gone to keep trying. "You're going to drive me *insane*, next time I'm going to worship you and tease you for hours—"

A sob interrupts his words, and Judai's about to ask, through the fog in his brain, if everything's alright—up until he feels Yusei's hands scrambling for purchase on his back, Yusei's own arching downwards at the same time his hips curve upwards and he comes, his cock twitching as it pushes his cum out right against Judai's, and after the initial realization, Judai immediately, puts his whole back into thrusting down, giving Yusei more friction, only half-aware that he's about to come as well up until he does, caught by surprise and almost slipping on the sleeping bags as heat and pressure overtake him.

Words slip from his lips, but he wouldn't be able to tell what they are, or even what language his brain decides he's speaking, and he has to find strength somewhere inside himself in order not to fall over Yusei like a ragdoll. He moves to kiss him instead, softer than their last, more lips than tongue, but Yusei jumps at the contact and his hands find Judai's hair, pulling him in with such unadulterated rawness that Judai is breathless from it.

"Was that good?" He asks, between kisses, trying to hold back his grin, and Yusei chuckles, playfully biting Judai's lip as if to reprimand him for trying to fish for compliments. "C'mon, babe, I know you're a pretty quiet guy but even you can spare a few words about how hard I rocked your world—"

“I can barely feel my legs,” Yusei interrupts him with, his voice a little worn down but light, airy. Filled with relaxation and fondness, with satisfaction, his smile speaking of happiness. It’s all Judai wanted to achieve, and he could cry with how glad he is that he did him good. He plans to do better, whenever an opportunity like this presents itself again. “That was... I don’t know how I’m supposed to stop thinking about it now.”

“An impressive first time, then?” Judai smirks down at Yusei, knowing his face must be the definition of smug, and the feeling only rises when Yusei rolls his eyes, blushing just-so. “I’m taking your silence as a yes.”

“And you’d be right,” Yusei mumbles back, admitting it with the full air of someone who would rather bite on a lemon, but Judai can tell it’s just a screen. He’s unnecessarily embarrassed about it, in his opinion, since he was nothing short of godly beautiful and hot, but Judai supposed it’s best to let him adapt slowly, instead of teasing him more than it’s warranted. “Ah, Judai, I think you can let go now...”

Judai blinks at Yusei and promptly moves his hand away from their dicks. He forgot about that, in the midst of making sure Yusei had a good time, and he stares at his hand coated in cum for only three seconds before shrugging and bringing it to his mouth, licking it off.

“Gross,” Yusei scrunches up his nose, turning his head away from the sight, but his cheeks are still pink. “That can’t be hygienic.”

Judai giggles, a joke popping up in his head. “Oh, well, you won’t know until you try it! After all, don’t you *love* milk—”

Judai is promptly hit over the head with a pillow, and he can’t hold back a howl of laughter, moving off Yusei’s body and laying on his back, cleaning off the rest of his hand with his shirt. Yusei protests this as well, but his words might as well be going in one ear, out the other one, since Judai takes off his shirt and cleans up the remains of cum over his stomach too, having to hold Yusei down with a hand in order to get him to stay still long enough to do it right.

“It’s called aftercare, dude,” Judai can barely talk through his smile, because Yusei is *so fucking cute*. He isn’t squeamish about anything most of the time, so seeing him pout and whine about something like this is both hilarious and rush-inducing. Judai could probably go for round two only based only on their chemistry right now, the air between them charged with the afterglow. “You’re so— no, forget it, there’s no word in any language to describe you.”

Yusei half-heartedly swats at his shoulder, as if telling him to knock it off. “Aren’t you supposed to be fluent in a bunch of them?”

Judai throws his shirt in the general direction of their packed-up luggage, planning to shove it into his bag come morning. He doesn’t want to be apart from Yusei right now, not even for a second. “That just means you’re beyond human intellect, love.”

And, oh. That pet name is new. Judai usually doesn’t think too hard about stuff like this, before it feels a little different to say ‘love’ rather than ‘babe’, or ‘darling’, or ‘honey’. They usually slip out of his mouth in English anyways, other times in Spanish, because he likes the way westerners do pet names, and this is no exception, but even Yusei blinks at it, instead of just rolling his eyes like he usually does. Silently, he scoots over and wraps his arms around Judai, pressing his face against his neck with that soft smile, the one that goes hand in hand with lowered eyelids, as if he’s thinking of something cheesy enough that he doesn’t want to say it out loud.

“Thank you,” Yusei whispers, as Judai returns the cuddle and pulls him in even closer, throwing a leg over his waist to lock him in his grip. “I... I’m really happy, right now, that we took this trip.”

Judai hums, closing his eyes. He’s not that tired, but they’re leaving early in the morning. It’s already past a reasonable hour to go to bed, probably closing in on one a.m., and Yusei is probably tired enough to fall asleep within the next ten, fifteen minutes, perpetual hard worker that he is, unable to properly rest until forced to.

“You know it was my pleasure,” Judai rubs Yusei’s back, sighing. He’s going to be procrastinating any trips outside of Japan really hard over the next month, after this. It’s not often that he would consider staying in the country for longer *just* for someone, but that’s Yusei— making the oldest yet newest desires pop back up in his heart. “I’m just happy you enjoyed yourself. You work so hard, I’m sure you’ll be scratching the walls in three days over having nothing to do.”

“I’ll have you,” Yusei shrugs, and Judai’s heart jumps, old, invisible scars flaring up, not with pain, but as a reminder of how many times he’s thought he had this. “And you’ll go insane if you stay for too long, so you’ll have me, too.”

Judai swallows. Four months, and Yusei already makes him feel more than he felt when he hit the one-year mark with Johan, more confident that yes, of course he has Judai, he’ll have him as long as he wants him and Judai will never dare say a word against it. Of course Judai will eventually be out of his mind to breathe in some new air, or different air, at least, but Yusei will be there to make it worth it. He wondered, when they first became friends, if Yusei always snuck under people’s skin until it was too late to pull him out, but now he knows that’s just a fact. He wouldn’t have him any other way.

“You need to be careful, speed racer,” Judai chuckles, grabbing one of Yusei’s hands to kiss his wrist, his palm, lovingly pressing his lips over the spot where he bit himself too hard. He’ll have to take a good look at it in the morning. “You’re making my heart do all kinda parkour shit.”

Yusei snorts, shaking his head. “I think that’s good.”

“Really? What if I have a heart attack?”

“I’ll hold you through it.”

Always so simple, yet so ridiculously tender. Judai knows he can’t predict this, he can’t even *promise* this, but he sure hopes they don’t break each other’s hearts. He would be short of devastated for life, if so. He can just feel it already, how Yusei’s ruined him. So, he hopes.

The next morning sees them clingy and sluggish, struggling to keep their eyes open and their hands off each other, up until they take one last soak in the hot springs before breakfast, and then they're off. The road trip back is an opposite of their trip before, with Judai driving first and Yusei taking charge of the radio. Yusei claims he's not a big fan of any particular music genre, but he seems fond of anything harmonious, vocal-focused, almost intimate, be it with traditional instruments or modern productions. When he doesn't know lyrics, he hums the melody to himself, so the first half of their roadtrip is nothing if not heaven on earth for Judai. The second half, Judai pulls the windows down, raises up the volume, and tells Yusei to hit the gas as hard as he wants to.

"No cop will pull you over anyways," he smirks, and Yusei grins back, just a little self-satisfied. The day Yusei is as wicked about something as Judai, is the day the world will end.

Yusei, as always not a pushover, shortens their estimated travel time in half, so it's still early for lunch when they make it back into New Domino and Yusei starts slowing down, but only just enough that he's confident he won't actually get pulled over. They both have big appetites though, especially after finding out the breakfast menu in the resort's restaurant isn't that impressive – it will cost them points in his review – so they stop for coffee and English bagels at a bakery neither of them have ever been to. It's kind of shit. He's definitely had better in, well, *England*, but Yusei doesn't seem to notice anything wrong with them, so Judai doesn't mention it. Yet.

"I've been thinking," Yusei says, after swallowing a sip of coffee, none-too-subtle about leaning his shoulder against Judai's, and the way he licks his lips. He hopes Crow and Jack aren't home. "I don't... I don't know what you'll think of it, but I've been wanting to change things up a little."

Judai lets his sunglasses slip down his nose to look at Yusei in the eye, watching him fiddle with his own glasses. He had no patience for contacts this morning, and Judai is in love with the look. "Well, don't hold back in my account— unless you want to break up, that is, in which case you should just shut up while I leave."

Yusei rolls his eyes at him, not taking the bait. He might think Judai isn't being serious at all, but the truth is, this is exactly what he would do if Yusei broke up with him. Just up and leave the country, for *months*, if he managed to.

"Don't be ridiculous," Yusei sighs, as if he can't even conceive that idea. It's nice to know they're on the same page about that. "No, I was just thinking of... moving out."

Judai blinks, eyebrows flying up to his forehead. "Really? I thought you were going to live in that garage turned man-cave until you turned eighty."

Yusei elbows him in the stomach, which is only fair. Judai criticizes that place a lot for someone who has only ever owned one place in his life, and that was his childhood home, a wretched thing on its own right.

"I'm being serious," Yusei takes a deep breath, and since he's practically asking for it, in how tense he's grown over the last two seconds, Judai wraps his arm around his shoulders, leaning his head against one, humming to let him know he's listening. "Jack and Crow are starting to get some name recognition in the big leagues, so they aren't around as much. It's a little lonely, sometimes, especially since Bruno moved out. And besides, I just... I was thinking that, I don't know, it would be nice. For us."

Judai opens his mouth, closes it, swallows. "Us?"

Yusei fidgets in his seat, rubbing his fingers. "I'm not asking you to move in with me, I don't want you to misinterpret that. I'm never going to take your freedom away, and I know you're happy as you are—but I thought it could be good for us to have somewhere to just... be together on our own, when you're in the city. It was just a little idea that came to mind when I started considering getting my own place, but after this trip..."

To be absolutely honest, Judai was about to freak the fuck out, thinking Yusei was suddenly going to turn around and ask him to move in with him. He's glad he isn't, and he can't help smiling like a fool at the implications of his words. He understands what he means—in the four months they've been together, they've only been alone a handful of times, or under very

limited timeframes. Judai was even considering going back to renting hotel rooms just so he could bring Yusei over, but this is... this is better.

“I dig it,” Judai nods, and rubs his cheek against Yusei’s shoulder, almost nuzzling him. He’ll forever be glad that Yusei is so fit, but he has to admit it would be nice if he was a little shorter, for the sake of making this more comfortable than it already is. Yusei has nice shoulders to lean on, though, so he’s not complaining. He’s perfect. “Sounds great, actually.”

Yusei exhales as if he’s been holding his breath, waiting for his response, and Judai wants to kiss him stupid— but he remembers the butt grab incident and decides to wait until they’re in the car, at least. He doesn’t think Yusei would take it any better if Judai tried to shove his tongue down his throat in a bakery, in front of the staff and all the other customers. He’s willing to make the sacrifice.

“Good,” Yusei smiles at him, and takes a rather large sip of his coffee, wincing. “This is missing some sugar, don’t you think?”

Judai pecks his cheek, and with his other hand, presses a finger against a bruise still forming over Yusei’s jaw. “Oh, honey, you’re all the sweetness I need.”

Yusei chokes on his coffee— and Judai is not ready to say it, not yet, even though he’s sure it’s painfully obvious.

But he’s in love.

Notes for the Chapter:

:D

6. first blowjob (given to yusei)

Notes for the Chapter:

yeah i was supposed to upload something other than this that was even filthier but here we are lmao. it's not as long as the other uploads but i mean, it's a blowjob, and i ain't no poet. we shall just indulge in it while i work on the longer, me thinks filthier, thing. fyi probably from now on the chapters won't be in chronological order, because that's fun, and also allows me to literally just write and finish whatever i want whenever. we love productivity.

also like, thank y'all for the love you've given this fic! i really appreciate it and i'm glad it has been well received. i'd like for everyone reading this to check out more starshipping fics other than this one since they deserve some love too, and there are lots of hidden gems in the starshipping tag!

anyways, let's get into the dick business lol.

Yusei wakes up slowly, as if gently coaxed into opening his eyes. He's warm all over, his body heavy with sleep, limbs still mostly unresponsive, but he feels the tickles of lips pressing against his navel and upwards, of hair brushing over his skin, and it gives him enough awareness to lift his arm, catching the back of Judai's head with his palm, just to let it drop to the back of his neck, so loosely that his arm almost falls right back to the bed.

Yusei is not usually someone to linger and hold on to his sleep like this, but ever since he started the process of moving from what's now Jack and Crow's to his own place, he's found himself enjoying their former shared home more, already nostalgic from the few nights he's already spent alone — this, of course, is influenced by Judai refusing to let him skip even a single hour of sleep, making him stay in bed for longer anyways. He's tremendously spoiled as of late, and it worries him it might become a habit hard to break.

Movement, startling him right out of his thoughts, and as such from going back to sleep, then brown eyes, with that almost unnoticeable green stain and a soft, warm grin, filling his senses, making him sigh, sleepy words weighting his tongue down.

"*Hm*, whatcha' you doing?"

Fingers dance playfully over Yusei's shirtless torso, from his shoulders to the hem of his underwear, making him shiver. He's vaguely aware that heat and pressure are pooling around his crotch, giving him a morning chub that is only encouraged by Judai's weight on him, his wandering fingers, the hint of heat behind his eyes. Yusei is not one for morning boners, either, or he wasn't, until Judai started sharing his bed. This, he can't really complain about.

"Morning," Judai says, leaning in to drop a kiss against Yusei's forehead, then his cheek, his lips, the tip of his nose. His voice is a little deeper than usual with leftover sleep, and it has Yusei's eyelashes fluttering, eyelids drooping, sleep trying to claim him once more. "Don't think about it too hard, yeah? Just wanna take care of you. I missed you so, so much while I was away."

"'kay," Is all Yusei mumbles in answer, letting Judai maneuver his hands around so they're resting over his shoulders, assuming he's just going to be kissed and snuggled and perhaps even massaged to hell and back, his eyes closing. He might be trusting him a little too blindly, but Judai hasn't given him reasons not to. He's almost unaware of his mouth moving, more murmurs leaving him. "Hm, love you... love you lots..."

Judai chuckles, and Yusei feels his breath against his neck, a kiss being pressed against it right after, words mumbled against his skin. "Me too."

Teeth follow the statement, soft but insistent, making Yusei a little light-headed, and then Judai pulls the skin of his neck into his mouth, sucking hard. Yusei makes a startled noise, eyes blinking open, but it feels nice and tingly and he's way too asleep to really understand the implications of it anyways. He likes it, very much so, so he lets it happen.

Judai's teeth drift, travelling lower on his neck, the curve where it meets his shoulder, the start of his clavicle. It has Yusei unconsciously curving his neck back, giving him more access to his skin, because it's so *good*, in the weirdest way possible, and he doesn't want it to stop, not even for a second. Judai starts running his lips over his chest in tiny kisses, nipping here and there in a way that makes Yusei's breath come out heavy, charged with sensation. Lips wrap around a nipple and Yusei startles again, eyes blinking open at the ceiling, but this time his hips twitch with it, rub against Judai's weight, cock insistently throbbing now, back arching in mostly unaware invitation.

"So cute," he hears Judai whisper, but he's immediately distracted by his lips again, by his tongue licking over that same nipple and the suction of his mouth. Yusei lets out what he might call something between a whine and a moan, closer to a mewl, his body twitching once more. Judai chuckles again. "Sensitive this morning, aren't we, hm?"

Yusei has forgotten how to use his tongue, but he doesn't have an answer anyways. He can't really think straight at all right now, and all he can recall is that night last week, when Judai bailed on a job just to tell him that he loves him, how Yusei got on his knees and sucked cock for the first time in his life— he's been trying not to think about it too hard, but now it's replaying, heating his skin further, the memory riling him up almost as much as Judai's presence.

Judai moves to his other nipple, sucking harder than he did to the other one, and what Yusei lets out this time is definitely a moan, loud and unrestrained, his toes curling, completely forgetting where they are. Hands are holding onto his waist, keeping his hips down because they want to arch upwards, find him friction, and when Judai takes his lips away just to blow cool air over the remaining humidity, Yusei feels his lips moving, though he can't really tell what he's saying.

"*'Please'*, you say?" Judai asks, but Yusei doesn't know what he means— he nods anyways, earnestly. Judai shushes him gently. "Hey, relax, I'm right here, I'll take care of you, no need to be so rushed."

Judai's weight lifts off his body for a second, leaving him cold where he isn't there anymore, wanting coiling in his body, making him tense. Yusei thinks, but isn't positive, that he's trembling, and the feeling only seems to intensify as hands ghost over his thighs, playfully pulling at the edge of his boxers shorts. He's covered his eyes with one of his arms now, hidden safely into the crook of his elbow, and it only seems to augment the feeling of being teased, of his body being delicately brushed with fingertips and just-so by nails, goosebumps taking over.

Lips again, this time over his hip, where his boxers have been lowered, making him shiver. Teeth, harsher than they've been until now, probably leaving marks, making quick work of his hips only to move on to the skin of his thighs, slowly inching their way up towards more delicate patches of skin, to where he's leaking and throbbing and twitching. Yusei isn't sure of this either, but noises seem to be escaping his mouth, breaking free from his throat. Something in his head tells him he should tone it down, but it requires brain power he doesn't have right now to actually consider it.

Judai pulls back again, but this time uses his hands to drag his boxers down, guiding them down his legs until they're completely off. Yusei shivers once more, spreading his legs when hands part his thighs, his face heating so much he thinks he might be cherry red, and swallows when nails dig slightly into his skin, almost tears up when breath ghosts over his cock.

"Now, babe," Judai says, his voice an octave lower than usual, pure thick honey. Yusei risks a look down, lifting his arm, and meets molten brown, as hot as boiling coffee, the sunlight peeking through the window hitting Judai's face just right, that he can see the hints of gold in them, breathtaking in their simple intensity. He's so *close*, Yusei can barely breathe. He might be hyperventilating. "What do we say?"

He doesn't even stop to think about it. "Judai, *please. Please*, I want, *god*, I want..."

Yusei doesn't know what he wants, not really. He's barely even begun to process the situation but he knows that he will not regret it. This is exactly how it felt last week, how it felt in their trip— his usually cool head just vanishes, making him struggle to string up a sentence. He'll take anything

Judai gives him right now, and let him take anything he wants in return. Yusei's offer from last time still stands, even if he doesn't want to acknowledge that he made it out of embarrassment.

He's not kept waiting for long. The contact is tiny at first, barely there, lips just barely brushing against his tip, but then the tongue comes out and Yusei says something, he believes, something that includes a lot of expletives, and Judai's chuckling again, in that foxy way he does, right against him— and then he *sucks*, quick but hard, sending a shock through Yusei that has him suddenly very awake and very in his body, and very very desperate.

His back arching and his hips following through, Yusei shuts his eyes and throws his head back, gasping. Hands are at his hips again, pushing him *hard*, down onto the bed, keeping him still as best as they can as Yusei's thighs try to squeeze shut, one foot ending up planted against Judai's back and the other one just pressing against the bed, toes curling into the sheets. He's twisting the bedsheets between his fingers in one hand, the other one having latched on to a pillow, and he can barely breathe. Fuck, no wonder Judai seemed to be losing some of his sanity last week, if it feels like *this*.

It only gets worse when Judai sucks again, when he starts taking him into his mouth, deeper and deeper, his hips twitching uselessly in his grip. There's a single minded focus to every swipe of his tongue, to every tiny suck, to the way he comes back up just to *tease*, tongue pressing against this slit before he's going back down. He has far more skill than Yusei does, of course, doesn't hesitate on any beat, and it is catastrophically disarming. Yusei's confident that he won't feel his legs afterwards, that he'll feel the warm, slick slide of those lips for days on end, that he'll dream about this when Judai's away again, that he'll have one too many nights with no company but for his fist and his memory.

But it's the words that do him in, in the end, because Judai seems to be incapable of keeping his tongue to himself when it pops up. Yusei knows some people might find it annoying but he secretly loves listening, so this is, *well*—

"You're really the cutest," Judai announces, going back to biting his thighs — and now it's big bites, *meant* to leave marks for him to feel proud about

later and for Yusei to wonder over — and wrapping a hand around Yusei's cock, his grip tight. There's no hint in his voice of him being worn out, except by the roughness of his words, vowels coming out almost harsh, foreign, as if he's forgotten what Japanese sounds like. It sends extra tingles down his spine. "You look so good, as well, you know? You're so pretty, it's unreal. And loud as well! I'm starting to wonder what it'd be like to edge you, see how red you turn, what sounds you'd make when I grope your— "

There's a playful tone to it, but Yusei hears that hidden edge, the heat behind it, and feels that pressure in his gut, that telltale twitch of his cock that means he's close. It makes him whine, roll his hips, and Judai curses out loud, stopping mid-sentence, which Yusei kind of glad for, since he doesn't think he'd survive Judai describing what filthy things he wants to do to him in detail right now. Or ever. Not under this environment.

"Definitely gorgeous," Judai mumbles, leaning back in to suck Yusei's tip again, sending him gasping for air. "It's hypnotizing. I don't know how I'll cope when I have to leave again, Yusei, I might video call you a *lot* more, since you're so pretty down here, too—"

"Stop," Yusei gasps out, biting his bottom lip as Judai's grip tightens and he lowers himself on his cock, until it's hitting the back of his throat, swallowing him with an almost casual flare to it, once he comes back up to stare at Yusei's face, no sign of being embarrassed over the ideas his brain is coming up with. "You... you say too many things, I can't..."

"Do you like that?" Judai rubs his tongue over his tip again, jacks him off at the same time, ignores the way Yusei scrambles to keep himself still. "No wonder you're so shy about praise if you like it that much."

Yusei wants to refute it, but all he can do is moan and tilt his hips, not even trying to hold back any more noises, not embarrassed about whether it looks needy or not. Judai seems to take pity on him, taking him fully, swallowing around him, sneaking a hand up his chest to pinch a nipple and trace his skin with his nails. It doesn't stop, not even for a second, and Yusei's body grows tense with every slide of lips, with every well placed kiss or suck, with that thing Judai does where he swirls his tongue and suction with his lips and makes him see stars.

Yusei slaps a hand over his mouth as he comes, a grain of self-awareness entering him just before falling into the feeling, giving in to the pressure and the heat, the goosebumps over his skin, the twitches of his body and his cock. He's vaguely aware of Judai having pulled off at some point, as his hand is in place of his mouth, somehow managing to elongate his orgasm for just a few more seconds with the way he grips him, confident and steady.

"That's it, so good," is what registers through the fog in his brain, reassuring kisses being dropped over his lips. "You did so well, so goddamn beautiful."

Yusei groans, his skin feeling too sensitive as full awareness comes back, and Judai releases his dick with little fanfare. Yusei opens his eyes just in time to see him lick a few drops of come off his hand, just like he did during their trips, and it should disgust him like it did before, but it only makes him want to kiss him, for some reason. Judai moves as if he heard his thoughts, which is not that far-fetched, diving tongue-first into a kiss that's entirely too heavy for Yusei's confused, overwhelmed head, one that makes him dizzy with how much he doesn't want it to end.

"What..." he starts, shaking his head, blinking at Judai's happy grin when he pulls back. "Judai, what was... *that*."

Judai rolls his eyes and leans in to kiss him again, softer, looking at him as if he tried to hang the moon on the sky for him and it ended up askew, yet Judai still loves it.

"That was a blowjob. You're familiar with them, aren't you, babe?" Is his answer, cheeky in its simplicity. Yusei's eyes widen as the information processes, feeling like he's suddenly been a victim of revenge, but Judai's already turning around, so he doesn't seem to notice. "I'll go make breakfast, I'm still too jet-lagged to jerk off without falling asleep right now."

He leaves the room without as much as a look back, not even a little embarrassed about the obvious tent in his pants—it makes Yusei remember with a quickly rooting panic that he's at Jack and Crow's place, that he's

supposed to finish moving this week, and that the walls are *thin*, and he was being way too loud, and now Judai's walking around with a boner...

Oh, well. He's already moving out. They can't kick him out—he just hopes they don't make jokes about him getting fucked yet, but it's fickle hope. Judging from the quickly raising voices coming muffled from the kitchen, they're already awake and Judai's dealing with it. He should go help... but he'd rather not. Aki probably already heard about it. He's more worried about *that* teasing.

Yusei turns his head to the front, looking up at the ceiling, and takes a deep breath as the information that Yuki Judai, his boyfriend of half a year, the person that he'll probably never ever want to leave, just gave him the first blowjob of *his life*. Maybe he shouldn't be that happy about it, since Judai seemed pretty casual about the whole ordeal, diving into it as if it were as natural as breathing, just like with their trip, showing none of Yusei's nervousness when *he* gave him a blowjob. He thinks about the tent in Judai's pants and bites his lip, instead, his heart beating a little faster. He... he might need to do some more research to catch up and be sure he's not going to get his mind blown past the point of repair. And to find a way to make himself more quiet, since he isn't looking forward to noise complaints — from former roommates or future neighbors alike.

Jack is starting to raise his voice, so Yusei sighs, thinking he might need to go help out after all. He licks his lips, realizes he can taste his own come, and finally sits up for the first time this morning. He needs to brush his teeth.

Notes for the Chapter:

[heart emoji]

7. first i love you (and a few other things)

Notes for the Chapter:

it's one am nice

why did this need smut? idk. they're in charge of this now. i only put what they want into words XD

have fuuuuuun!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Tomorrow is Valentine's Day. The thought's been haunting Yusei for the better part of the week, but today it just won't leave him alone, hammering away at most of his other thoughts like a stubborn woodpecker. Crammed in his new but still-mostly-empty apartment, with a few boxes that consist of unpacked furniture, tools, and old Duel Monsters cards he should probably let go of, with only his thoughts for company, the meaning of the date on the calendar pokes at him until Yusei is forced to acknowledge it, or otherwise he might hit his own head against the wall in an attempt to make it go away.

He's been dating Judai officially for, perhaps – as if he's not counting each hour – six months, and Yusei is convinced he might have fallen too hard too fast. As if jumping off an edge to take a leap of faith, just to find that you've skipped the fall and already hit the ground. It's painful, excruciatingly so, but solid and undeniable, and you can't help but be relieved about having skipped most of the terror that came with it. Key word being *most*.

Yusei had been mostly blind to romantic love, before Judai. He was conscious about it being a thing, of course, but it just never occurred to him that it was something *he* could participate in. That it was something he could have, instead of it and all its ups and downs being reserved for others. It makes him want to laugh, sometimes, when he thinks back at how he saw romantic love before this, as if it was some sort of impossible task to check off a life goals list which he lost somewhere in his laundry and never recovered, something completely out of his curve, this lifetime around.

Well, that might be a lie, if he really stretches his memory and thinks back to more painful years, harsher times that weren't as kind to him as now. There was an inkling of *something*, when he met Kiryu, that made his breath a little shorter and his heart beat a little faster. But that was a fleeting thing, based on feelings that while deep, were mostly mixed in with the other things Kiryu made him feel, with the accident that finally made Yusei realize they were risking too much for too little, and it still puzzles him to this day. It hurts sometimes, that confusion, in a way that's a little dull after years since they last spoke, but it's forever present as a bittersweet reminder, weighting his heart down with the promises he made and has thankfully managed to keep.

One thing Yusei is sure of, though, is that whatever it was, it certainly wasn't anything like *this*.

Yusei was – and still is – so clueless about this type of love, the type people have historically started wars for, that he would be one of the first to say he's married to his bike or to his work. Aki asked him out on a date when they met in college, and he didn't even realize it until she told him so, in the middle of it, to which he blanched and said he wasn't sure he was into her, or into women at all. She hadn't taken it to heart, thankfully, because she didn't actually like him, but she had squinted and asked, almost concerned, how he can just... not have a clue. Yusei had only helplessly shrugged and started talking about class and his bike some more, trying not to think too much about it.

Not his brightest moment, no, and everyone still gives him shit about it – and about a couple mishaps with Bruno, which he admittedly deserves – but it was the best Yusei could do. He had never had any experience with romance, hadn't felt an inkling of physical attraction towards anyone, had barely, and very vaguely so, wondered if it would be nice to hold Kiryu's hand. That was pretty much it for him, and he was fine with that. He was somewhat comfortable with himself, his life was looking up after a long time of it just going downhill further and further, his love for his friends and found family making the not too amazing things worth it...

... and then he met Judai.

Judai, much like everything Yusei's seen him do, came into his life like a goddamn hurricane, destroying everything he thought he knew about romance, and made it so Yusei didn't even have to *think* about wanting him. He barely reacted when he looked at Judai, one afternoon at an arcade, scolding and kicking some bully's ass at a game in order to defend a kid, and his heart *squeezed* so hard in his chest Yusei almost tripped face first onto the ground.

He just accepted that Judai's presence filled him with this simple yet profound understanding of him, this need to be closer, this want for his laughter and his smiles and his eyes looking at him, this feeling of being seen and heard and needed back, in a way that wasn't selfish or questionable but rather thoughtful, considerate, pure. It happened so slowly, after they became friends, the shaping of these feelings going past a simple crush, that it basically crept on Yusei. By the time he noticed he was already fantasizing about kissing him— and maybe something more, but Yusei still feels overwhelmed by that and how much he wants it, even though he doesn't know how to ask. He still can't believe that he admitted to Judai that he's basically a holy virgin, that he came apart so easily when he touched him for the first time.

He just *wanted him*, and as Yusei came to learn when they were still friends, so did a whole lot of other people. He wasn't given many specifics, but Yusei was heavily intimidated, and he still is, by the number of people Judai has claimed have tried to ask him out, and that he's *actually* dated, just in his circle of close friends. Yusei's self-confidence took a nice hit, when he realized that Judai had relationships before, relationships that ended badly or didn't really start at all, and it made him hesitant to be with Yusei at all.

It was so delicate, so tentative, but there's a valid reason for it. Judai's terrified of being asked to change, of one day being asked to stay put and never leave again, of not being accepted at face value for who he is and what he wants. Judai had quite a bunch of what-ifs himself, risked his heart for them a few times despite knowing that it wouldn't end well, only for that gut instinct to be proven right. To get their relationship started was a little like craving stone, a stone so small that it could break any second if the wrong force or angle was applied to it. Yusei had been so scared, when he

first woke up the morning after Judai slept over for the first time, frozen against this chest and clinging so strongly. Judai had looked absolutely terrified himself, but they mellowed out throughout the day, their trust in each other shining through and soothing their hearts. Dinner was so nice, when they actually went on their date, private and filled with little more than conversation, laughter, pizza and wine, a sense of elation taking over them as they realized everything was as easy as breathing.

But it wasn't until after their eyes met, over the remains of their meal in the hotel room Judai insisted they rent for privacy, that his initial concerns seemed to have been stripped away. He had seen something in Yusei that had made him decide that it was a good choice to try, one more time, *for him*, and Yusei had held his breath and kissed him for it, not being able to resist the fondness and warmth in his eyes, all teeth and noses colliding because Yusei had only been kissed once or twice, without his consent with no follow up, so he had no idea how it worked until Judai grabbed his shoulders, pushed him back.

"Slow down, speed fiend," Judai had chuckled, his voice low, whispery, making Yusei feel all sorts of things from his head to his toes, and then he had leaned in, kissed him so softly Yusei had gone dizzy with it. Judai's eyes were twinkling. "I'll get you used to it."

And he certainly did, that night, kissing him until Yusei couldn't keep his eyes open. Judai might not have kissed him before their date, not properly, but he sure made the wait worth it, like a proper tease.

Letting Judai go back to work after that wasn't quite as easy as it was before, but it wasn't painful, and it still isn't. Yusei had learned, when they were still friends, that Judai was very much like a friendly street cat, coming in and out but not loving you any less when not around you, or maybe even a soul *meant* for that incessant wanderlust that seems to make Judai's skin itch when he's at one place for longer than a few months, if he's to believe what he's seen and been told by him.

Yusei didn't really have any trouble with it, despite Judai's fears that he would feel left behind. They talk on the phone every day when they can, when they're not busy and the timezones aren't *too* off, and if Yusei didn't

mind the space before, he certainly doesn't now, even if he misses being kissed into oblivion. Much of Yusei's life has felt a little overcrowded, a little too loud and touched by tragedy and bad decisions, even if not necessarily all of it was awful, so it's nice for him to be able to just lean back, turn off his brain, and fall asleep to the sound of Judai talking about what he's doing during his trips, his voice like the sweetest lullaby.

'You're an ancient soul trapped in an entirely too small vessel', is what Judai had to say about it, grinning but with eyes so serious that Yusei had believed him, because there's something about Judai that just *knows* things, as well. He told him so a few weeks after their trip, through the phone when he finally left for a job, in pained whispers after a conversation about Yubel, the good and the bad, and he believed him on that too. There was no question of it. By this point, Yusei doesn't doubt he might be a little magical — he thinks it's probably something Judai was blessed with, for being the way he is.

It's been six months of it now, and Judai's come back to Japan on and off since. The longest he's been away is currently happening; he was hired to lead an excursion through Europe by a Japanese university, so their foreign exchange students were able to do the research they're supposed to be doing comfortably, and he's been gone for almost two months, now, probably closer to one and half. Not that Yusei's counting that as well.

He's set to be back by next week or so, and Yusei has to admit that, while he hasn't been *lonely*, what with all his friends and talking to Judai pretty much every day, he's felt an itch to see him, almost desperately so, to bury his face in his neck and be the little spoon in a big, amazing, long nap. Perhaps it's more accurate to say he's been craving the physical intimacy Judai's gotten him used to— but Yusei's so new to that, too, that he doesn't know what to make of himself.

So, he's unpacking his boxes. He's probably been at it for several hours now with little progress, because he can't think straight. He would have a drink, but he hasn't plugged in his fridge yet, so the six-pack of beer he bought under the pretension it was for visitors is dreadfully warm. He's been staying on and off in his former place with Crow and Jack, slowly making his move to his new place by himself in order to fill up his free time, but

after assembling the bed last weekend so he could start getting used to sleeping in a queen-size, Yusei has little choice but to sit here and think, since it's too late to try and drive back now.

He's supposed to finish moving around next week, anyways, only his stuff from university left to sort out, so he stands up and goes to plug in the fridge. He should have done it when he arrived anyways, and now that he's in the kitchen, he thinks a cup of hot cocoa might do him well. He hasn't even plugged in the TV either, but that's amendable. At least he did have the Wi-Fi installed first thing. Priorities are priorities, and most likely the only straight thing about him, if barely.

As Yusei stares at his hot chocolate boiling – instant, the kind Judai hates – he can't help but pout to himself, just a little bit. He misses his boyfriend. He misses his ridiculous looking hair, he misses his impossible-to-count grins, he misses the way he stumbles over his own tongue sometimes because his brain is a mess of languages and way too quick thoughts, he misses the way he wraps Yusei in his arms and makes him feel so much safer than he's ever felt, even though he has a smaller frame than his. He misses the sugar-sweet kisses and the nicknames. Judai's made him so soft, Yusei might just *be* the hot coco he's currently making. He can hardly believe they met when he was seventeen and didn't see each other again for *years*, despite being connected through several people, only to fall in love like this.

Distantly, Yusei wonders if Judai also feels like this; like he's been holding his breath his whole life until they properly met again. Yusei knows he's loved, he sees it in the way Judai doesn't want to go right back to travelling when he comes back, in the way he's sometimes woken up to see him staring in the middle of the night, whispering sweet nothings, in the way he's never broken a promise. He doesn't want him to think Yusei is just waiting to tie him down, like others have, and he doesn't want Judai to ever walk away from him *forever*, with no promise to call, or message him, or to come back. He's worried he isn't enough for him, too, that his world is too small for Judai to ever fit with everything that he is, and that it will eventually make him seek out other things, other *people*, who are far more suited for someone as free-spirited as him.

But Yusei means what he said, six months ago. Maybe he wants to be messed up. Maybe he wants Judai to be his one and only, even if it ends in flames. It's worth the risk— after all, when it's about people, nothing safe is worth the drive, if you're not going to put yourself on the line *on principle* anyways.

"Fuck me," Yusei mumbles to himself, shaking himself. It's been six months, they've known each other not even for two years yet, but he *sure is* struggling not to try and give this man his children. Or whatever he wants from him, really. "Yuki Judai... fuck me."

He probably sounds insane, to be fair. He's a little out of it. He had a tough time sleeping last night, overthinking his projects for university, the summer programs he's going to be doing, whether he's really going for the PhD after all, when he's done with the masters next year, wondering how it'd feel to kiss Judai until his mouth bruises and his body tingles with pleasure and his legs become jelly.

Important stuff, in short.

He makes his way back to his room, cup of hot chocolate in hand, and sits on his bed with his laptop, trying not to feel bad about all the extra space he has now, mindlessly scrolling through his folders upon folders of university work to do for tomorrow and then just giving up on organizing any of it, heading to YouTube. There's nothing to watch at— well, fuck him, three a.m., it's officially Valentine's Day now, but that's fine, it's a weekend anyways, and he's already worked on his most pressing matters this morning.

Yusei makes it halfway through a compilation of cat videos, his hot chocolate now gone, before he realizes that he can call Judai right now. He's probably awake— it should still be around nighttime where he is, if not much earlier, and it probably wouldn't be desperate to wish him a happy Valentine's, would it?

He decides it isn't, and he decides that he isn't biased to think so, damn him. Grabbing his phone, Yusei hits the speed dial icon he has for Judai on his home screen – well, one out of many, really, since Judai refuses to get his

phone numbers together, this one being the only personal one – and brings it up to his ear, sighing as it starts ringing.

He waits. And then he waits for a few more rings. And then the call goes to voicemail.

Yusei tries two more times just to be sure, but it goes to voicemail every time. He guesses Judai might just be busy and it isn't anything to worry about or overthink, but he recalls him saying it's supposed to be his off day. Shrugging, Yusei figures he's probably sleeping the day away, further fucking up his sleep schedule and probably dooming himself to some terrible jet lag, and goes back to his kitty videos. He'll leave him a message later.

Yusei doesn't get to hit play on the video before his doorbells rings, and his immediate thought is that someone's come to murder him. There's no other reason anyone he knows would come to his new place at three a.m. without calling first, even if it was an emergency, and neighbors don't just ask for sugar at this hour either. Naturally, Yusei keeps a finger on the call button to the police and occupies his other hand with a wrench he abandoned on the floor earlier today. He has to step around boxes and half-assembled furniture in order to make it to his door, and for the first time since he got the place he's thankful for the door having a peep hole, since otherwise he'd have to open the door right away.

Closing his right eye and leaning against the door, Yusei takes a look outside. At first, he can't really distinguish anything in the dark, but the owner of the building always leaves a lamp in the hallway a little ways from Yusei's door, for safety and visibility for the security cameras, so shadows are casted and he's able to see the silhouette of his visitor.

Yusei freezes and almost drops his wrench on his foot. He'd recognize that hair just about anywhere, and he stares for a little too long, baffled. Now that he's *seen* it, Yusei recognizes the barely-contained energy that's way too familiar filling his visitor's demeanor, in the way they rock on the balls of their feet, as well as the edge of the jacket that the light hits just-so. Yusei drops the wrench off to the side and opens the door in one movement,

holding his breath. Judai blinks at where the door used to be, hand raised as if about to hit the doorbell again.

And then he looks at Yusei, meets his eyes, and that slow, wonderful, sunshine grin that Yusei's starting to feel he might reserve just for him, takes over his lips.

"Yusei," he breathes out, his grin wider by the second, his eyes so warm and happy Yusei might just spontaneously combust. "Happy Valentine's, babe."

Yusei opens his mouth, lets it hang open, and considers closing his door and opening it again, just to see if he somehow is looking into another universe. But he doesn't want to risk it, so he doesn't.

"I— what. How?" He ends up asking instead, shaking his head. He gestures up and down at Judai, crossing his arms right after, probably looking as insane as he feels. "*What?*"

"I missed you," Judai says, so easily, as if Yusei hasn't been biting down the words for a month now. "I wanted to see you, and spend Valentine's Day with you. It was weird, you know, I was just walking around, looking at all these couples, at shops setting up for tomorrow and well— before I knew it, I was getting on a plane."

Yusei thinks he might have lost the ability to think, as if his brain is ever on around Judai. "Your job?"

Judai tilts his head, shrugging, smile turning sheepish as he plays with the strap of his duffle bag over his shoulder. "Eh, I probably should have given them some notice. They'll be fine though, this week is free-for-all, and it's the last week! I did leave my phone in my hotel room, though. Would you let me use yours later, before they realize I'm gone and call the police or something?"

Judai, as always, moves too fast for Yusei to be able to process it as successfully as he could at three a.m. He mumbles a '*sure*', and then, with no hesitation, grabs the neck of Judai's shirt and pulls him in for a kiss, closing the door the second he's inside with a kick of his foot. Judai eagerly

falls into it, bag forgotten on the floor, hands holding onto Yusei's waist and pulling him in, cutting all distance, his big stupid smile almost detrimental to the kiss. Yusei almost trips over a box, somehow manages to lead them to his couch – which is still covered in plastic – and allows Judai to push him down, to cover his body with his own and take his breath away.

Kissing Judai doesn't get old. It's one of the first things Yusei learned, and one of his favorites among a long list about him. He just doesn't get tired of it, of how Judai pours *everything* into every kiss, no matter how brief or small or deep or toe-curling. Within minutes, Yusei's gasping for breath, overwhelmed, lips slick and red and *he'll make damn sure*, properly bruised. Instead of stopping entirely, Judai moves the kisses to his jaw, nibbles over his pulse point; a thrill goes through Yusei's body, heat pools, and a moan escapes him as he remembers all too vividly their night together while on their trip, two months ago now, how something like it hasn't happened again because Judai left when Yusei was still processing it, and he's barely been back long enough for him to have the nerve to ask for it.

Judai looks at him, then, pulling back with half-lidded eyes darker than Yusei recalls ever seeing them, making him shiver as they stare through him. The heat of it disappears not a second later, either carefully hidden or snuffed away as if it was part of Yusei's kiss-drunk brain's imagination, but he knows it'll haunt him every single night now, real or not.

"I have something to say," Judai announces, tilting his head. He licks his lips, distracts Yusei even further, but his voice is like a beacon of light right now, snatching his attention. "I came all the way here to say it, actually, I think. The longer I look at you the more confident I am of it."

Yusei blinks through the fog in his brain, wondering if he should be flattered or concerned. "What is it?"

Judai looks at him again, serious, as if considering him, committing his face to memory. Searching him. The expression softens with every second that passes, and then a little smile, one of the soft ones that he rarely lets people see, graces Yusei's eyes.

"I love you, that's all," he says, simple as can be, implying the inevitable with his tone of voice, but the words are like a sucker punch to Yusei. He suddenly can't breathe, as if waiting for the punchline. It doesn't come. "I love you so much I'd probably *try* to stay if *you* asked, you know? I'd bail on a thousand jobs and then some, and I'd probably do whatever the fuck you'd want me to, if you'd have me."

Yusei makes a strangled sound that he doesn't fully recognize as his, swallowing, his eyes suddenly feeling a little watery. "Judai..."

"I understand if you don't feel that way yet," Judai chuckles, and Yusei absolutely *hates* how self-deprecating it is, as if Yusei isn't almost losing it from conflicting feelings of happiness and disbelief right under his eyes. "Just thought I should say it. I knew I would fall for you, but I didn't expect it to be this fast. I love you, Yusei. *I love you*. I could say it in every language I know and then like, get a dictionary to say it some more—"

"I love you too," Yusei blurts out, his emotions taking the best of him and making him unable to listen to more of Judai *destroying him*. He blinks away fast-forming tears, not knowing why he's even crying about this, helpless to the growing, light feeling inside his chest, like a rising tide. "Judai, I love you too, how could I *not*?"

Judai's eyes go wide, shocked, and he seems at loss for words for a few seconds, bringing a hand up to wipe a couple of tears escaping from Yusei's eyes. He sighs, then, and Yusei can tell he is *relieved* about this, as happy as he is, and *in love* as he is, he's glad that he isn't risking his heart quite as dangerously by himself, and it makes Yusei's heart go crazy, making him move to lift his head and kiss Judai, all pliant open lips and hands buried in his hair.

His thoughts are all fuzzy within seconds, and a hunger raises in his chest that Yusei automatically pours out into the kiss, sucking Judai's tongue and letting his lips be bitten and sucked raw, being met with that same intensity instantaneously. His heartbeat is a wild beat in his ears, and it matches the pace of his lungs, when Judai pulls back to look down at him, breaking their kiss, that darkness in his gaze coming back even hotter, stronger, making Yusei shiver, goosebumps on his skin.

"You were going to get the bed ready last weekend, right?" Judai asks, though it sounds more like he's demanding the answer, his voice a delightful combination of strong and kind. Yusei can barely get himself to nod in response. "Good."

Judai goes to sit back, but Yusei has little to no patience to bother walking into his bedroom. Is the room far? No. But staying here is quicker, and besides—the couch does have the plastic on. It won't stain. Instead of opening his mouth or grabbing him, Yusei just slides onto the floor, on his knees, and stares at Judai as his eyes widen, looking at Yusei as if he can't believe what he's seeing.

"Yusei?" His voice is cautious, but Yusei can see the intrigued glint in his eyes, that sprinkle of interest. Of lust. It makes him think he's doing something right, and the thought makes him bite his lip. "Don't you want to get to bed?"

Yusei feels his cheeks heating, and a little voice in the back of his mind tells him he's being really stupid about this and that it's going to go wrong, but he buries it down. He's been doing... research, ever since they took that trip. Which basically means he watched a lot of porn that didn't look pleasurable at all, and then he read a lot of articles, and a couple of books, on the subject of sex. He wanted to at least have knowledge of what people usually did, how it worked, because he's never gone into things completely unprepared – at least as of the last few years – in order to figure out how to make Judai feel as good as he made him feel.

Yusei was confused by that raw, unquenchable want that rose up inside him, that day. Clueless as usual about this type of relationship. He didn't really know what he wanted, other than for Judai to touch him, and even then a part of him *craved*, inexplicably, things that he had never even thought about before. When he saw Judai pulling out of his pants, a part of him had choked, and he honestly hasn't been able to stop thinking about it since then, even though he thinks it's weird to be this obsessed with a glimpse of your boyfriend's cock.

He wanted to put it in his mouth. Or at least, the wandering thought had snuck in, disappeared, and reappeared when he started doing his research.

He almost, *almost*, followed some advice online to practice on dildos, going as far as to look at prices for the toy online, but he chickened out before he could even actually look at sizes, too embarrassed to go through with it.

But he still wants to try, even if he'll be laughably bad at it. Yusei makes eye contact as Judai straightens up and lets him kneel between his legs, still staring as if he's in a very vivid dream, and it makes him realize that he hasn't explained himself yet.

"I... I want to *try*," Yusei licks his lips, swallows when Judai's eyes narrow, examining him. Yusei can't help leaning against his touch when he brings a hand up to his cheek, delicate yet full of promise. "You know I've never done *this*, but I. I really want to just... try."

Yusei hopes he doesn't sound this pathetic in other areas of his life. His hands are sweaty and he can barely breathe right, staring back at Judai in anticipation, and only finds himself relaxing when he sees him smile, lazy and cocky, just on the right side of smug.

"Fuck, babe," Judai mumbles, running his thumb over Yusei's lips, pressing just so. Yusei's mouth falls open on its own, since he just wants to go with the flow, like Judai told him to do last time, and it steals a captivated sigh from Judai's lips. "You got me hard as fuck in less than five minutes just with this."

Yusei's face goes deep red, and he speaks against Judai's fingers, his voice shaky. "That's... good, isn't it?"

"Well, if you want me to last more than a horny teenager, probably not," Judai winks, deepening his blush but not hiding his own— Yusei doesn't understand how it is that he apparently drives Judai this mad, but he's going to enjoy it while it lasts. "It is okay if I guide you a little through it? I don't want you to choke too badly, even if that's kinda hot— I mean! Uh. Yeah. This is your first time. I don't want you to feel pressured..."

Judai trails off and curses himself under his breath, unaware of the thrill running down Yusei's spine, at the idea that Judai, deep down – or maybe not that deep, considering he's incapable of not blurting it out – wants to

mess him up just as much as Yusei wants him to. And that's, well, more literal than Yusei thought he meant it, himself, but he guesses he should just roll with that, too.

"It's fine, just," Yusei shyly brings his hands up to Judai's knees, squeezing them just so, hoping they don't start shaking. His voice is already doing that well enough on its own. "Just, ah, help me... help me learn how you like it, I guess."

Judai nods, his smile turning sweet, and he moves his hand to run over Yusei's hair, sending reassuring waves through his body as if he had pressed a button. "No need to be nervous, yeah?"

Yusei thinks that's too easy for him to say. Judai probably has plenty of experience going down on people and with people going down on him – and he feels a little jealous about it, for a short second, if only for his own lack of experience being a burden – so *he* has no reason to be jittery. Yusei couldn't even make it halfway through a porn movie before being both disturbed and embarrassed, so he thinks the balance is a little off center here.

But that's him overthinking. He knows he's not the only one losing his goddamn mind over this. Judai's occasional ramblings are always entertaining, and somewhat comforting, because they let Yusei know that he has his full trust, to a degree in which he doesn't care to filter himself anymore. It makes him breathe a little easier, knowing that he's as excited, and it makes it far less daunting to pull his pants and underwear down, just enough to free his cock.

Yusei can't be sure, but he believes he might have made a sound, at the sight, that might have not been very sexy. Judai's hand in his hair is now a grip, not tight enough to pull, but certainly present in a way that's making his mind run a little wild with images of what, exactly, he could use that hand for. Yusei's going to have to admit that Judai's right; he has a filthy, filthy mind that right now is begging him to lick off the drop of precum forming over Judai's slit, among other things. He remembers reading something about working up to taking your lover's pants off as teasing, but it's already too late for that, and Judai doesn't look like he needs the

teasing, either way. Judai says something, or so he thinks, but Yusei's too busy recalling online posts about blowjobs to really listen. He leans in instead, poking his tongue out, hears Judai making an even louder sound and looks up, startled, blinking rapidly, just a breath away from his tongue making contact with the head of his cock.

Judai *seems* to curse in what Yusei *thinks* might be Portuguese but could very well be Spanish, staring at Yusei as if he's some sort of miracle, the grip on his hair tightening with every second that happens.

He stumbles over his tongue, mumbling something in Korean, before finally remembering Japanese. "Yusei, next time, when we're like this, can I take a picture?"

"What!?" Yusei almost chokes on the word, and Judai's gone even redder, as if he didn't intend to say that at all. "*What?*"

"*Nevermind!*" Judai groans, and his other hand comes to grab his cock by the base, holding it in Yusei's direction like an offering. "Why don't you try it like this for starters?"

"As if you're feeding me?"

He says it without thinking, but the way Judai reacts, his jaw clenching and his eyes narrowing, eating him up from above, make it very clear he does not care about examining that comparison right now. They're talking business and well, Yusei's always been ridiculously weak to Judai being like this, in control and serious, his lips for once not turning up with a smile. It reminds him of his own throbbing cock, so he decides he'd like to try it like Judai suggests, just so he can have a hand free to touch himself. He would try to hold out, but he's burning up inside, and they've taken way too long to get this started.

Yusei doesn't say more and leans in just like before, tongue first, cautiously licking at the head and shivering at the impact of the salty taste of skin, of precum, not really prepared for how it stimulates his tongue and makes him salivate just a little. Keeping his tongue pressed, Yusei rubs the head in circles, across the span of his tongue, opening his mouth wide, and Judai

makes a deep, helpless sound, as if coming from the very depths of his chest. It successfully edges him on, thankful that his cautiousness might be taken as pleasant, and gives him enough confidence to wrap his lips around the tip, trying to abide by the rule about keeping his teeth out of this.

He hesitates on whether he should go further or linger, and just out of curiosity, sucks on the head first, bringing one of his hands up to grab Judai's thigh for leverage. A loud exclamation of '*fuck!*' follows this, as well as more precum hitting his tongue, so Yusei goes a little deeper, managing about a third, perhaps almost half, before he finds it difficult to continue, and bobs his head back up.

He pulls off his cock entirely, licking his lips and ignoring the drool dripping down his chin, looking up at Judai. "Is that alright?"

Judai's chest is rising up and down fast, and he's biting his lip, that look in his eye remaining from earlier, like any second now he's going to run out of patience and make him take it. Yusei would be lying if he said the idea isn't intriguing.

"It's good," Judai nods, tilting his head to the side. "You looked this up, didn't you?"

Yusei can't even pretend to be surprised by how easily Judai reads him. "Yes."

He nods again, swallows, eyes like a hawk, the tight edge of his voice melting into something hotter, smoother, and just on the right side of commanding. "Show me what you learned about, then."

A familiar feeling that makes him want to prove himself tingles under his skin, making him not hesitate when he leans in again, this time testing the give of his throat by going as deep as he can. He doesn't get too far, once more, about half before it starts feeling too intrusive, so he pulls back, sucks on the head, experiments by running his tongue downwards on one side, then upwards from the other, as if sucking on an ice pop. Judai moans between words, some of which Yusei can recognize and some that he can't, but he gets the general idea that he's being edged on, praised. It pushes him

to go faster, gradually picking up speed until Judai pulls at his hair, as if to tell him he's found the right pace, and Yusei groans, himself, a hand moving on it's own to slip inside his pajama pants. It proves too distracting, once it makes contact; he can't keep his hips from bucking into his fist and his moaning, the rush of arousal, make his already sloppy movements even messier, all attempts at imitating techniques he's read about falling apart.

Judai's hips thrust, once, seemingly unexpected even for him, as he tries again to take him down his throat, and Yusei immediately chokes, tears springing up from his eyes. Judai's hand on his hair becomes gentle, and he's saying something that Yusei can't process over the sound of his heart beating and his blood rushing—he doubles down on how deep Judai is right now instead, the fullness of it taking his attention away from jerking himself off into adapting, trying to breathe in and out through his nose, and managing to swallow around it.

"*Hoooly* shit, fuck, that's—" Judai's voice cracks, his pitch all over the place in a way that would probably be considered unattractive in any other situation, but just as fast, it drops down several levels, back to filthy in a second, to the equivalent of taking a warm shower during the summer, overwhelming, steaming hot, burning in its wake. "*Fuck*, you look innocent but you are beyond gorgeous like this. I could fuck your mouth *so good*—"

Out of seemingly nowhere, at least for Yusei's long-gone sanity, his orgasm starts creeping on him, despite his hand having gone limp. He moans, as best as he can around Judai's cock, loud and desperate, the hand he has on Judai's thigh tightening as his body tenses up. He's almost, almost there, but he can only seem to move his mouth, for he sucks his way off Judai's cock and looks up at him, unaware of the kind of expression he's making when their eyes meet, Judai's own disarming into his jaw dropping when he sees the state Yusei's in.

"Please?" he asks, though it should probably be called begging. His voice is hoarse, throat not used to this, but it only makes Judai narrow his eyes, listening closely. "*Please*, I'm so close, Judai..."

Silence, as Judai's free hand moves up to Yusei's cheek, thumb brushing over his already-swollen lips. Yusei doesn't even think about putting it in

his mouth, sucking, watching Judai as his breath catches, his eyes widening as if he's realizing something.

"Take the tip," Judai *orders*, not room for argument, and Yusei all too eagerly goes for it, forgetting his thumb and sucking the head into his mouth again, eyes closed. "Yeah, just like that. *Don't* move. I know exactly what you need."

Judai grabs hold of his own cock and starts stroking with his fingers, making a tight ring that runs from the base to where Yusei's lips are. Precum flows freely into Yusei's mouth, and as he finds enough will to stroke himself once more, at the same pace Judai is, his lips suck and his tongue licks, tempted to dive deeper and feel Judai stuffing his mouth again, but his guidance has him frozen, incapable of doing little more than this and holding on to his leg—he's confident he'll leave a bruise there, but he could not give any lesser fucks about that.

"You did so good. You're *doing* so good," Judai mumbles, and Yusei only gets it because he's surrounded by him, completely, utterly stripped down to his very core, openly soaking in his smell, taste, *presence*. "Fuck, you—Yusei, you might want to, ah, shit, get off if you don't want to uh, *swallow* —"

Judai's a little late on the warning. Yusei has not finished processing that, giving up on resisting and actually sliding his mouth a little deeper, before the hand in his hair clenches rather painfully and tries to jerk him back, meeting resistance and making it so Yusei tastes the first few drops of cum that twitch out of Judai's cock, the rest landing over his face, his open lips, nose, forehead, cheek, *probably* his hair.

His eyes were already closed, thankfully, and while he wants to open them and watch Judai falling apart, he just stays there instead, equally frozen, waiting for him to be done almost tearing up with how close he is himself, his hips twitching and his hand shaking around his dick.

"Yusei," Judai gasps out, but Yusei doesn't get to even open his eyes before he feels himself being pushed, can only blink them open as his back lands on the floor to see Judai sliding to the ground, feel his hands slapping his

own away from inside his pajamas with an almost frantic speed to it. "You're so painfully perfect, I want you to come—"

Yusei's whole body jerks, as Judai pulls at his pants, sliding them only halfway to his knees before wrapping a hand around his cock, keeping him trapped looking at his eyes. They flicker with fire, burning up his body, and it's almost that look that makes him come, more than the few strokes it takes for Yusei's body to tense up again, stuttering moans ripped from his lips.

Judai is on him before he can even come down from the high, locking their lips together and probably smearing come all over his own face, licking eagerly into his mouth without second thoughts about where it just was. Yusei is blissfully overwhelmed, trembling, trying to find his brain somewhere in his head but only coming up with fluff. He can't say he hates it.

"*So hot*," Judai says, in English, and Yusei's learned a little, in their time dating, but this he would recognize by tone only, that heavy longing and heat recognizable beyond language barriers. "God, I don't know what possessed you to do that but it was *amazing*."

Yusei would like to say his common sense is returning to him, but it seems to still be disconnected, considering how he blurts out words. "I've been thinking about your cock ever since I saw it. Wanted to get it in my mouth."

Judai groans and buries his head against Yusei's neck. "Fuck, do you have *any* idea how much that turns me on? What are you, a succubus? Sent to torture me and steal my soul through sex?"

"We haven't had sex yet," Yusei points out, feeling more helpful than he really is being, as if he needs to remind Judai of that. He is not responsible for what comes out next. "We can if you want to, right now, though."

Judai chokes. "Oh god, I'm going to die."

Yusei nuzzles the top of his head, oblivious to his suffering. "I love you."

Judai kisses him, chaste and soft, but it somehow still manages to steal Yusei's breath away. He might be confusing oxygen with his heart.

"I love you too, but you're wrong about one thing, though," Judai sighs, tracing Yusei's face with his fingertips, following the scar that Yusei forgets he even has. "We've had sex twice now."

Yusei blinks. "I think I'd remember getting fucked."

Judai stares at him in disbelief and then bursts out laughing, grabbing Yusei's face with both hands and pressing his lips all over the skin they come into contact with, in wet, aggressive kisses, making him scrunch up his nose and close his eyes under the assault.

"Yusei, sex is more than *anal*," Judai wheezes out, and Yusei goes red, from his toes to the top of his head. He's not prepared to have this conversation. "Or penetration, for that matter. That handjob I gave you, and the grinding we did? Sex. This blowjob? Sex. Anything else that we might do in the future? Sex. You need to get into it, like you did just know, just enjoy the sex and stop thinking *about* the sex—"

"Can you stop saying that word?"

"No," Judai giggles, and usually Yusei would be worried he's being laughed at because of his inexperience, but Judai's not like that. It's easy to tell, by looking at his eyes; he's laughing because he's charmed. In love. Yusei might need a second to himself to cry into a pillow. "I want you to be comfortable with sex, for both our sakes. A healthy sex life means plenty of communication— though you've said a lot tonight, haven't you?"

Yusei pretends eye contact isn't a thing. "No. I didn't."

Judai kisses him *again*, and if Yusei were unreasonable he would complain about them still being on the floor, with their pants down, about the cum on his face and hair, but *he's* also charmed. He's also in love. And the kiss is deep, loving, makes Yusei want to repeat his offer because it seems that about twenty-two years of barely having interest in jacking off is catching up to his libido really fast.

But his body betrays him, as it often does, and soon he's yawning, having to break away from the kiss to do so. It's hitting him, both the fact that it's closing in on four a.m or later, and that he hasn't kept up the best sleeping schedule this week, amidst almost being done with the move and college and work existing. Judai lingers in his space, watches him with those big, fond eyes of his, softened from his usual shining spark, with the smile that has screamed '*i love you*' more than a thousand times but only now gets to actually claim it.

"I'm sorry," Yusei mumbles, running a hand through Judai's hair, closing his eyes. "I would stay up with you, but I'm a little tired."

"That's alright," Judai kisses his cheek and sits up, dragging Yusei up with him. His body feels heavier than it did early, and cold where Judai isn't touching him, but he doesn't get to do anything about it before Judai's tucking him back into his pajamas and then tucking *himself* into his underwear, discarding his jeans entirely. "C'mon, bathroom. I'll clean up your face."

"I'm not a baby," Yusei protests, but another yawn breaks through, squashing the meaning. He has to resist rubbing his eyes like a child, just to not give Judai the satisfaction of cooing at it. "I can clean up."

"You sure can," Judai nods, indulging in the way someone indulges harmless nonsense, so Yusei kicks him lightly in the shin, once they're standing, huffing. "You'll fall asleep on your feet again, don't be so whiny. I can be a mom too, you know!"

Yusei doesn't even refute that statement. He allows himself to be dragged into the bathroom, openly whines when Judai tries to clean the cum off his face with his *tongue*, like the absolute little shit he is, and then spends about five minutes getting his face washed, with no place for argument from him. Judai kisses him again afterwards, which makes it all worth it, but Yusei draws the line at him offering a shoulder rub. He knows exactly where that would go, and he's too tired for that now, even if his dick might disagree. He's afraid to fall asleep in the middle of it and miss something good.

Judai has to go fetch a new toothbrush from the stash he keeps in his bag for travelling, just in case he loses the one he's using, which he did, so Yusei gets the bathroom to himself for a few seconds, in which he remembers Judai's face when he said he loves him and almost spontaneously combusts on the spot. Judai finds him like that, frozen and red faced, trying to brush his teeth while unaware he's just rubbing at the same spot.

"Adorable," Judai whispers, and Yusei has enough of a mind to half-heartedly glare at him. He's met with a big, happy smile, already covered in toothpaste foam. "I love you."

Yusei feels faint, the rush of the words hitting him way too hard for how tired he is, and he wobbles in his feet as he lets his tongue take over. No need for a filter right now.

"I love you," he says, and repeats it a few more times while reaching out for Judai's hand, holding it in his. "Is this real?"

Judai laughs, jovial and honest. "Fuck, I hope so, though you're certainly too good to be true. You're so *kind*. Selfless. *Too* selfless, actually. And, you've seen your thighs? Juicy stuff. I want to eat you whole—"

Yusei's face goes up in flames, noticeably so, because Judai bursts out laughing, almost choking on his toothbrush. Yusei finishes brushing his teeth and runs away from the bathroom, throwing himself into the bed and hugging a pillow, huffing. He doesn't know why he gets so embarrassed, but Judai's praise feels different from Tenjoin-sensei telling him he's doing a great job, from his boss patting his back after a long day, from his friends pointing out, several times over, how thoughtful he is. It has to be something unique to Judai, one way or another, or maybe Yusei is just... really in love and really gay. It could be a healthy mix of both.

Judai lands on his back, knocking the air off his lungs, and wraps himself around him, legs and arms holding him prisoner in a hug, one that Yusei doesn't mind one bit.

He leans close to his ear, chuckling despite the gravity of his words. "I'll love you from here to my grave."

Yusei's heartbeat skyrockets, the way it does when he's racing Jack or Crow, when Judai kisses him. "Isn't that too big of a promise?"

"What, like I will regret *you*?" Judai shakes his head, and Yusei would turn around to see his expression, but he's so comfortable, half his face buried into the pillow, Judai's arms holding him. And he wants to believe him, too, despite Yusei's ever-present anxiety and insecurities trying to make him think otherwise. He loves him. He wants him. "Ridiculous. You won't get rid of me now, speed lover."

Yusei snorts. "New pet name?"

"Thought I'd try it out," Judai rubs his head against Yusei's shoulder, sighing. "I'm serious, though. I love you that badly. I said what I said, and I mean it."

"I know. I believe you. I want to believe you," Yusei lets out his own shaky sigh, closing his eyes. "I love you the same way."

"That settles it, then," Judai whispers, and presses a kiss over his ear. "Ride or die has never been so literal, huh?"

It's not even funny or accurate, not really, but Yusei laughs, turns around, meets Judai halfway into a kiss, and spends longer than he will remember in the morning being engraved by him, the only proof to it his swollen mouth, the dark shadows under his eyes, the smile that won't drop from his lips, and the way Judai wakes up backwards, talking to Yusei in Korean and then English before remembering where his brain is and stumbling onto Japanese with a confused expression, because his jet lag is indeed terrible.

Yusei's afraid of very little, by this point in his life. He's watched his family die. He's lost contact with people he never wanted out of his life before. He's seen how far people would go to live another day. But nothing scares him more than the thought of losing Judai. Despite it he falls, willingly,

blindly. And he will continue to do so every day, as long as he can. There will be no one else, now. And he's happy with that.

Notes for the Chapter:

do u people have any idea how hard it was to not make a milk joke

8. first fight

Notes for the Chapter:

i come with gift

enjoy, fellas

Judai's been in Europe for almost three months now, and Yusei hasn't been answering the calls reaching his phone for the past week, his heart dropping to the bottom of his stomach each time he allows another one go to voicemail, guilt eating him up inside. He knows he shouldn't be ignoring him like this, but his feelings are completely taking over, making it hard for him to do something as simple as breathing.

It was dumb. It was so fucking dumb, any other day, Yusei would have been able to pull back, get his bearings, properly string up a straight thought, but the shoe dropped right when they were both feeling exhausted from long days of work. His feelings got the best of him so badly that now he doesn't know what to think, how to get reassurance in order to not believe the lies his mind plays him, how to even *begin* to try and fix this. He messed up almost as badly as Judai did, in a completely different way, and he hasn't been able to sleep properly or control his anxiety well enough to do anything that isn't overreacting.

Because he is, that is, overreacting. He's fully aware of this, and yet, can't stop it. Judai's been gone for a long time, alright, the longest since they started dating, but everything was *fine*, they were video chatting almost every single day, with little to no missed weekends. He's been staying with his friends that live across the countries he's working in, and more recently, with Johan-san, who's someone Yusei hasn't personally met yet except in passing or by word of mouth, mainly through Judai's stories and many, many late night or early morning conversations. They dated once, high school sweethearts as far as Judai's told him; he's that handsome European man that Yusei saw in Judai's Instagram, more than a year ago now, shortly after they met, but they seem to be close friends despite it.

Yusei is ashamed to say that the issue involved him, if only marginally, since Johan-san holds absolutely zero responsibility for it. It happened during a video call, Yusei doing homework and Judai chilling in silence while he worked, relaxing from his day of meetings and field work he's been doing in Sweden with Johan-san. It was a quiet, comforting atmosphere, the two of them basking in each other's presence as much as they could with the barrier of distance, completely content— up until Johan-san walked into the bedroom, asking about dinner.

Admittedly, Yusei couldn't hear the conversation really well, and he doesn't think he even knew Yusei was on a call with Judai, but he can perfectly recall Johan-san making a rather dirty joke about how Judai likes his buns, remembers in detail the surprised, delighted lightness to Judai's laughter, the way he smiled and how his voice shifted with his equally jokey, dirty answer, with the familiarity of someone that is used to this, that probably *missed it*. Something heavy sat on Yusei's chest, while he watched the exchange, making him forget what he was even trying to do before Johan-san walked in. He just froze, from head to toe, and dread slowly settled alongside that uncomfortable, choking feeling, the comfort of before completely stripped away and leaving him cold in the span of ten seconds.

Judai knows him well by now, so he noticed.

"Everything alright?" He asked, spectacularly failing to read the room, to read Yusei like he usually does. It made his brain get all fuzzy, even as Judai frowned in concern "Yusei?"

Yusei bit his lip, casted his eyes downwards. He didn't really know what was wrong then, and he still isn't one-hundred percent sure now, not really. His heart was beating a little too loudly and his throat was closing up, but he guessed he should say something, anything, to make up for his mood shift, to try and make it better again. Judai always says that he should tell him if he's upset, *especially* if it's because of something that involves him, so he steeled himself, to try and address what made him feel so bad in that moment.

Clearing his throat, Yusei stuttered the words out, not at all confident in them. "It's— I'm just... do you and Johan-san always talk like that?"

His voice came out so tiny, low, clearly unsure and hesitant, and Yusei immediately hated it with a burning passion, because he's been trying not to let his insecurities eat at him ever since they started dating, almost ten months ago now. But he failed, in that moment, and he's failing now. Judai became openly worried, a little confused if the way he tilted his head was any indication, but he didn't seem to catch on like he usually does, too tired this time to read between the lines when Yusei fails to find words for his feelings.

"I mean, yeah. We're still close friends," Judai swallowed, visibly, and Yusei started to twist his hands together over his lap, off camera, biting his lip and clenching his jaw. That... that didn't make him feel better. He already knew that. "You... you aren't jealous, are you?"

Yusei actually startled at this, his body jumping without his input, but he couldn't bring himself to look directly at Judai's eyes. He had to force his words out. "Those jokes just seem... awfully intimate."

"We're just teasing— I probably should have warned you, though. Sorry," Judai sighed, conjuring up a smile when Yusei dared to look at him, for only a few seconds before his eyes fell again. He did not see it, but Judai's smile fell with them. "It's not a big deal, is it?"

Yusei shrugged. He wasn't sure if he was jealous. Everything was overwhelming and confusing, a fog of emotions he's never felt this strongly clouding his mind mixing with the part of his brain that tries to trick him into thinking less of himself, with the anxiety. "Isn't it... weird?"

Judai opens and closes his mouth, frowning.

"Not at all, to be honest. You know what, it's cool, don't worry about it. I should have warned you we get like that sometimes, so I'm sorry if that made you uncomfortable" Yusei winced a little at the words, swallowing. It's not what he wanted to hear, and it somehow got worse. "I guess it would be weird if we didn't like, love and knew each other, but it doesn't really feel that way, it's rather natural with him and stuff, since Johan is so nice..."

Yusei's whole expression twisted, his lips tightening. He felt his face getting red, red from hurt, hitting him full force like a train at top speed, more painful than every scar on his body and every accident he's ever been on. It choked him, his eyes watering, but he blinked it away, looking down at his notes for a few seconds.

He knows, now, that they were both wrong here, blindly approaching the situation from the worst possible angle. Yusei's not an idiot, even if he might be being one right now, by letting his emotions drive instead of stepping back and thinking logically to be able to stop ignoring Judai, in order to explain properly what he said wrong and why it made him upset, so they could move forwards— but the heart often rules over the mind, and Yusei can't expect himself to be the exception, and he can't expect Judai to read his mind every time, either, or to realize the full connotations of those words being said to him so carelessly, how it *sounds*, when considering Yusei's new to even being in a relationship at all.

So Yusei spiraled down and didn't stop it. His thoughts got away from him, only to come back with all the things he's been a little worried or afraid of a few times, regarding their relationship, amplified to infinity by that gnawing feeling that he barely knows Judai at all, in comparison to others, especially to someone like Johan-san. It was only a matter of time before Yusei would get too boring and Judai recalled how much better his past relationships were, in regards to being adventurous, less limited to one location, before he unconsciously made comparisons to Yusei's rather normal, non-exciting lifestyle. He doesn't doubt Judai loves him, of course, Judai's not a liar, the nice things he's said to him about being the best he's had are probably true as well— that doesn't mean it's what he *wants*, unconsciously or not. Maybe he wants the shaky, rocky, treacherous lovers he's had before. Maybe Yusei will be his second choice in a few years. Maybe he's already considering other options—

He couldn't stand it, on that moment. Shutting down on your partner is probably not a viable solution to unresolved hurt feelings, but it's what Yusei did, practically slamming the only half-opened door, which has been worked on for ten months or so now, on Judai's face.

Yusei rather suddenly cleared his throat, snapping out of his brain, looking at his wrist watch, fishing for any excuse. "I should... I think I'm done here, I'm just gonna— I'm gonna go."

"So soon?" Judai asked in a rush, pouting, but Yusei still wouldn't look at him, wouldn't meet his gaze. He couldn't think past the tears he was forcing down, past the *'i told you so'* that this brain was trying to choke down his throat. "We barely even—"

"—I need to go," Yusei snapped the words this time, and Judai bit his tongue at his tone, clipped and tight. He didn't mean to sound angry, because he wasn't, and still isn't. He just feels like an open wound, instead, terrified beyond belief. "I'll... I'll see you next week. Have— have fun with Johan-san."

Yusei hung up, hoped that his words didn't sound as bitter to Judai as they did to him, and stared at his laptop screen for a few minutes. Eventually, Judai texted, apparently having realized the situation, saying that he's sorry, that it's not like that with Johan-san, asking if he's alright, if he can explain, what he can do to help, but by that point Yusei was just... gone. Mentally, logically, his brain became unplugged, so he closed his laptop and went to bed without answering a word.

He'd like to say he slept, but he just stared at his ceiling for endless hours, bathing in his hurt, failing to nurse his wounds. He doesn't know why it hurts so badly, as if he's being tore open by the chest. He doesn't even know which part bothered him the most, apart from Judai's ill-oriented words. The dirty joke? Not really, Aki and Crow make those around and with him, even Jack and Bruno join in sometimes, so it would be dishonest to say Judai isn't allowed to joke about sex with a friend, regardless of their past dating history. Was it just a bad moment that ticked him off? Judai's been gone for a while, and Yusei's been drowning in work and classes. He misses him badly, terribly, and he's gotten used to his bed being *their* bed already, despite Judai only staying here for a couple months, at *most*, since Yusei finished the move.

Was it the familiarity in Judai's expression? His complete, absolute trust? The loving smile, with the gaze of someone that's looking at an individual

who has marked his whole life, for better and for worse?

Maybe.

It's stupid. At least, Yusei thinks it's stupid. He shouldn't be this upset. He's being a baby because what he already knew could happen might be turning into reality, and he doesn't want to deal with it. Judai can be dense, sometimes, so he probably doesn't know better, can't tell that, despite his love, he's probably about to be done with Yusei even though Yusei doesn't want him to be, and he can't blame him. Yusei knew, from the day they met, that he wasn't enough for Judai, and that Judai was too much and he was being greedy for trying to chase his heart. He did it anyways and now he's too scared to face it.

Yusei wouldn't even call it jealousy, not really— he has no business pretending Judai doesn't look at him with adoration and worship, with love, with unspoken feelings that overwhelm him just like that. They've been dating for almost a year, so there's familiarity between them, comfort, a shared knowledge that they won't be the same after... *after*, if it happens. But it's... Yusei's *terrified*. He thought it would eventually stop, months ago, but his anxiety gnaws at him, his insecurities tear him up, his self-confidence laughs in his face. He wants the best for Judai, since he deserves someone who can match him step by step, and Yusei's known from day one that he's too jaded, too used up by his short, but certainly overbearing life, to shine like Judai deserves someone to shine with.

He neglected to share these fears in their entirety, in *full detail*, over the last couple months, mostly because Yusei likes to pretend they aren't there and that he's fine, but they've only strengthened very, very recently, from where they used to lay mostly dormant, after Judai said he was taking a bunch of long jobs in Europe, following their almost two months full of bliss living together since he arrived on Valentine's Day.

Yusei's brought it up before, kind of, by pointing out how much Judai is, how he would have found someone else if he hasn't met Yusei, but Judai always gazed at him and pressed him with a look that said he thought that's some bullshit, and Yusei was inclined to believe him, if reluctantly so, because it's so *easy* for Judai to shower him in love in a way that strips him

completely of doubts, that make him think he gets to keep him, that make him think that it's *worth* believing him.

Maybe Yusei should have been more honest, about how his hesitancy to speed up their intimacy beyond handjobs and blowjobs comes from being paranoid about accident scars, ones that Judai's already seen, rather than *just* being embarrassed. About how part of the reason he's so tired is because he keeps startling awake at night, when Judai's long asleep, from equally paranoid nightmares of memories he'd rather keep buried. He's opened up about Kiryu and the long years of the old wrecked Domino, little by little, and Yusei's learned more about Yubel and Judai's high school years in return, but despite how vulnerable he already is around Judai, Yusei can't break the habit of hiding *this*, the weaknesses, the *ugly*, even though he trusts him.

Maybe he should have told him, far more explicitly, how scared he is of just being a stepping stone on his life. That Judai will move on with a smile and thank him for a few fun months. Perhaps, if he had just opened up about *that*, at least, if he would've had Judai's reassurance, he would have avoided how these past couple of months, those fears became stronger, fueled by the distance, and then, by the knowledge that Judai was staying with someone he once loved.

Or, apparently, still loves, whatever that means. Yusei wants to reject his frantic thoughts, telling him it's romantic love, since he knows everyone can love their friends just as deeply as a lover without it being like that, but he's weak to them right now, and it makes his eyes watery, as he lays there. This time, he lets the tears fall, muffles his shaking, tiny sobs into his pillows and tries to get himself under control, managing only after about ten minutes and absolutely dreading how empty and cold his bed feels. He usually isn't a crier, but it's like someone's taken his heart out of his chest and cut it open, just to rub salt in it. If he had the emotional capacity right now, Yusei would probably marvel at how deeply he feels, after so many years of just being fine.

Foolishly, he thought he would feel better in the morning. That he would wake up and just realize how overdramatic he's being and call Judai and everything would solve itself, but that doesn't happen. He just feels a little

dead inside, and looking at his phone when he gets to his office doesn't help, because Judai left so many messages apologizing and begging him to talk to him that Yusei almost cried again, right there while standing in the middle of the engineering lab. It's not that he doesn't believe him, of course, but he can't bring himself to relax enough to trust it won't end like this anyways, give or take another year, or even a few months, especially after Yusei reacted like this to a little friendly joke. A text is not enough of a reassurance right now. A phone call is not enough either, even if it's marginally better. But Yusei won't pull Judai from work. Not ever. He promised, and he stands by that.

It's affecting *his* job, though. Tenjoin-sensei is a colleague now, something Yusei still has to adapt to, and she's pointed out several times over the last three days that he looks sick, too pale and tired. She's asked him if he's alright, if he's having trouble with work or with his classes, but Yusei can see in her eyes that she probably knows about what happened with Judai, and that she's checking up on him for more than just Yusei's own sake. He can't say he's mad about it; to the contrary, he's glad Judai's keeping an eye on him in the most non-intrusive way he can, showing he cares, but it makes him dizzy with guilt and hurt anyways, for shutting the door on him like he did. He wonders if he feels the same, like someone's suddenly shot a bullet through his heart.

Aki notices, too. She looks about ready to kill Judai when Yusei explains, trusting her to be a little more subtle than Crow and Jack would be if they found out, and he's right.

"Yusei," she sighs, immediately after swearing in hushed tones, mellowing out because she knows he doesn't need the thorns, right now. He needs the petals, and she wraps him in a hug that Yusei hunches into, patting his back. "Yusei, it's alright. You *know* you're too deep in your brain. Judai-san is too in tune with his feelings to slip up like this and for it not to be an honest mistake."

Yusei shrugs. "Yes, I know. But Aki, I'm... I don't know what to do. I've been ignoring him because I don't know what to say. What if I messed it up?"

"Yusei, you did what you could in that moment to handle it, and while it wasn't ideal, what's done is done," Aki breaks away from the hug and holds him by the shoulders, looking up at him with fire in her eyes. "You're both wonderful people, Yusei. You two *will*, get through this. Each couple has its misunderstandings— the first is always the hardest."

A knot forms in Yusei's throat, and he's almost overwhelmed by how much he's glad for Aki, how much he loves her, but he can't tell her how much he doesn't believe that. Maybe it was a mistake to let her know, after all, but her presence at least helps him feel marginally better, and he could use sound advice anyways, even if it's biased to think Yusei will be worth enough to fix this.

"I'm supposed to pick him up at the airport in two weeks, but I don't think he expects me to anymore," Yusei pauses, staring at his feet before looking back at her. "It's just... how will I talk to him? I can barely *think* right now, how will I do it when he's in front of me?"

"You'll manage," Aki insists, hands on his shoulders, squeezing them. He's not so sure about that. "You love him. You want this to work. And he loves you, so he'll understand if you're feeling a little raw— or at least he better, or we'll have *something* to discuss between the two of us."

Despite the cloud over his head, Aki manages to pry a tiny grin from him. "Please don't threaten him. This... this is just harder than I thought I'd be."

Yusei's not exactly talking about solving their missteps, even if he does want to try, but he ignores his own grimness for now, looking at the way Aki's eyes soften, how she offers her own smile. "First fights always are, Yusei. It'll be alright. I could bet my heart on it."

"I don't know—"

"No! I'm not hearing any protests! You are the best person I've ever met, and anyone would be lucky to have you," Aki pauses, shaking her head in disbelief. "And *you* are lucky enough that Judai-san *knows this*, and that he won't let you get away with devaluing yourself either. Now, *please*, text him

that you're picking him up so you can talk. I don't want to hear more of this unless it's good news. Got it?"

Yusei's terrified of her, to be honest. She'll probably be very disappointed with Yusei's results. "Yes, ma'am."

Aki's expression falls away to a smile, soft and innocent. "Shall we head to lunch, then?"

Judai calls him shortly after lunch break, after Aki's gone back to her medicine internship in the biology lab, and left Yusei in engineering by himself. Yusei stares at his phone for a few seconds as it rings, thinking about how it must be around seven a.m over where Judai is, the sun not even up yet, and takes a deep breath before answering. The first thing he hears is a relieved sigh, which almost has him tearing up again, the knot in his throat fighting his resolve. Right now, Yusei could probably be torn in half, and he'd barely feel it over the pain and relief it brings to hear Judai's voice, because of how much he loves him.

"Yusei," Judai says, a shaky exhale of breath, almost whispered, and Yusei doesn't think he's heard his voice say his name with this much longing before, with this much urgency. "Fuck, listen, I'm so, so fucking sorry, I'm so fucking dumb for saying that shit—"

"Judai," Yusei chokes out, closing his eyes, clenching his free hand into a fist and sitting down on a stool, his legs feeling like jelly. He should have done this in the bathroom, since he risks breaking down where anyone could walk in, but it's too late to regret it now. "Judai, I don't want to do this over the phone. I can't."

Judai takes a very audible deep breath. Yusei can picture him nodding, biting his tongue, holding back so many things. "Right, of course, I... well, my flight leaves tonight, so I should make it there by midday tomorrow—"

"Tonight?" Yusei repeats, blinking, his mouth gaping open and closed like a fish. Did he go too deep in his mind he missed a whole week? "Isn't your flight in two weeks?"

"Yusei, I can't wait two more weeks to see you and talk to you and, fuck, beg you to forgive me," Judai sighs again, but it's desperate now, frustrated. "I would be there already if I hadn't been forced to sort things out here first. Fuck this fucking job. I'll take a cab to your place when I arrive and I'll get on my knees if it's necessary—"

"I can pick you up," Yusei rushes out, swallowing, and Judai lets out a soft, stunned 'oh', as if Yusei wasn't so close to panicked over his words, his implications, as if he wasn't equally desperate to see him. "Aki will be taking a trip this weekend with Sherry, so I'll have her car by midday, since she wants me to do a check-up. I'll just skip work tomorrow."

"What?" Judai asks it loudly, his tone shifting in a way that lets Yusei know he's frowning. "You don't have to skip work for me. I don't mind waiting for tomorrow night for you to be free, and I have your key."

"Tenjoin-san offered me a sick leave. I'll just take it," Yusei licks his lips, running a hand through his hair. He feels it now, how exhausted he is from not having slept well all week, from how little he's eaten. "You're bailing on a contract, Judai. It's fine. I'll be fine."

Judai's voice comes out rough, worried, and colored with concern that makes Yusei's heart *bleed*. "Are you alright? Are you sick?"

Yusei blinks his eyes open and sighs, shaking his head. "No... I just miss you."

"Fuck, I—" Judai cuts himself off, laughs in a sardonic, bitter way, so unlike himself that there's no doubt, just with this, that he's hurting just as much as Yusei is. "I miss you too. I love you. I'm so sorry."

And the worst part is, Yusei believes him. "I know, I'm... I'm sorry too."

They hang up shortly after that, and Yusei sits there, head buried in his hands, until Tenjoin-san walks in from her own lunch break. She's immediately on Yusei, checking if he's alright, but he only asks her about the sick leave and pretends not to notice her concerned looks as she signs it. He leaves work in a daze, arrives home and immediately throws himself in

bed, trying not to think too hard of tomorrow. Aki will stop by in the morning to leave her car with him, and will probably try to encourage him again, since he texted her to explain he'd be using it and why, but Yusei's anxiety is getting the best of him once more, making him curl into a ball and hug a pillow to his chest.

It's so cold. Yusei's always been a little weak to cold weather, but this is a different kind of cold, one that sinks into his bones and it's all too familiar. It's the cold that Judai drove away, on complete accident, when he crashed into Yusei's life and made it a little less grim with each day that passed, until he could only feel warm. He knows it's just the discussion they're going to have making him nervous, but it makes him scared again, that if it really ends here, Yusei will have to get used to living like *this* again.

He falls asleep at some point, and wakes up with the sun and a crick on his neck that throbs each time he tries to turn his head to the left. For the first time in what's probably forever, or maybe since Judai left, Yusei wants to stay in bed and keep sleeping, but his body is insistent about him getting up to make breakfast, a habit that he cannot break from his days helping Martha – and he's glad for it, too, otherwise Yusei would be skipping more than just a few lunches at work or at college – so he stops fighting it and groans his way into the bathroom to wash his face and brush his teeth. He would like to say it cleared his head, but it honestly just made him feel colder than he already was, and a frown permanently craves itself into his expression, even as he adds copious amounts of sugar to his coffee to try and lift his own mood.

Aki takes one look at him when she comes to drop her keys and seems to resist the urge to tuck him into bed herself. “That bad, huh?”

“I don't know,” Yusei shrugs, rubbing his hand over the part of his neck that is in pain. Judai taught him how to give himself shoulder and neck rubs, so he could sort out knots on his own, but his hands feel dumb right now, uncharacteristically shaky, like he's incapable of coordinating them right. He knows for a fact they'll only be good for the automatic motions of tinkering with an engine, today. “You want to stay for breakfast?”

“I can’t,” Aki frowns, and brings a hand up to Yusei’s shoulder, making eye contact. Yusei wouldn’t say his friends are too aware of what he tries to keep buried, but Aki always seems to have a little more compassion, understands a little better what runs through his head. Maybe in another life, it would have been easy to love her as more than a sister. But Yusei doesn’t think he needs easy, unless he wants to trick himself even further into thinking he’s *fine*. He isn’t sure what that means for Judai, but he’d like to think it’s good, if Judai decides to keep loving him. “But hey, stay strong, alright? It’ll probably go better than you think it will. Relax.”

Yusei hasn’t fully relaxed or let his guard down in about ten years. Only Judai got him close to it, but Aki doesn’t need to know that, so Yusei smiles, even if it’s a little painful, and nods. “I’ll try.”

Aki hugs him, reminds him to not freak himself out, and leaves in a flurry of rose-scented perfume and encouraging smiles. Yusei forces down his breakfast, just egg rolls and rice, and then heads down to the apartment building’s parking lot to start working on the car, itching to kill time and focus on things he understands. The ride down the elevator makes him jittery, and not for the first time since he moved, Yusei regrets not going for a place with a garage. But if it was hard to find an apartment, it probably would have made him tear his hair out trying to find a place he could afford in the city at ground level with a private garage.

He could move back, maybe. The only advantage of having his own place, beyond the lack of arguments about dishes and other chores, is not having to expect anyone to come back. But it seems he might have tied it a little too closely to Judai, and now, well... he isn’t as confident as he was one, three weeks ago, four months ago, about it just being a casual offering. He sees little point in living alone and spending more money, even if that’s not an issue, when he’s just going to be expecting the same thing he was before. Judai made it worth it, so worth it, after Yusei finally found somewhere he liked, to wait for him, and he’s afraid he’ll have too much time with his thoughts if Judai stops promising to come back.

Needless to say, Yusei’s failed at not thinking too much already, but at least he managed to change the oil and replace the part that was giving Aki some issues. He would take it to the car wash, but that would probably take all

morning, so he just tests the engine, drives around the parking lot to make sure nothing else is amiss, and goes back upstairs, scratching at the oil spots on his gloves.

He should take a shower right away, but he settles for changing clothes and settling at his desk, determined to not waste the whole day by finishing it off an essay. His focus could be better, even if it's an improvement in comparison to early this week, but his calm is as fake as can be, his emotions still boiling in the little box Yusei managed to push them into after his talk with Judai. Midday comes too soon, but Yusei skips lunch in favor of a quick shower before heading to the airport, having spent a few more seconds in front of the bathroom mirror grimacing at his complexion. He drives slower than he usually does, and finds himself missing his bike, but he doesn't think he would be able to handle the physical closeness it requires to pick up Judai with it, at least not without shaking badly enough to make them crash.

Yusei isn't sure if he likes airports. They're too bright and large, sometimes, and full of so many people sometimes that it makes him alert, glancing around as he walks to the terminal Judai texted him. The gift shops are overpriced and even obnoxious, the food stands entirely too happy to pretend you couldn't get a better deal and a better flavor anywhere else in the city, and there's a general frantic energy to every single person around, except maybe the staff and those that are already used to this atmosphere.

Yusei is not one of those people. He'd have issues, getting used to this, and it reminds him once more how different he is from Judai, how the only thing he can offer him is a bed and the certainty that he'll never move, that he'll stay where he is and he'll be content with it. Yusei's probably the one that's getting the most out of this relationship, stealing Judai's free time, learning about things that are so out of his reach that he can barely wrap his head around it, being given a free pass to not have to take care of Judai and take charge of their relationship the way it is with most of the people in his life, being loved so freely.

Yusei's sure that no one would stare at someone crying in an airport— that's probably common. But he leashes his feelings, ties them up well, and buries his hands into the pockets of his jacket in order to stop their shaking. Judai's

airplane comes in not much later, and while Yusei's picked him up several times over the last ten months, and even before that, it hits him differently, this time, to watch him from afar, how he gives the staff his ticket, how he waits for his luggage, how he gazes around and freezes when his eyes find Yusei.

Before, this is when Judai's face turned into a smile, wide and unrestrained, loving. Today, his eyes narrow with worry, run over Yusei's body as if to check he's in one piece, rushes to his side with an urgency much less light-hearted than usual. But he doesn't stop in front of him, at a distance, like Yusei thought he would. He comes close, instead, into his personal space, hands coming up to hold Yusei's cheeks, his lips twisting downwards as he examines him.

"God, Yusei," Judai whispers, shaking his head, and Yusei very stubbornly swallows the knot in his throat. He wants to hug him, kiss him, wrap himself in his presence, but he can't bring himself to do it. "Yusei, I've missed you."

Yusei's eyes drop to the floor, towards Judai's shoes. He's wearing differently colored socks, so he focuses on that, instead, as he nods, forcing himself to speak even though his brain is begging him to run away. "I've missed you too. I'm... I'm glad you're back."

"I..." Judai hesitates, but he can't seem to bring himself to finish the sentence. Instead, he switches gears. "We should... we should get going, right?"

Yusei nods again. He wants to get this over with, so he can nurse his wounds in peace, so he takes one of Judai's bag and allows him to carry the other one, thankful for having something to do with his hands, if at least for a few minutes.

Unfortunately, things are not quite as smooth after that. They make it around ten minutes into the car ride, tension and silence building between them, before Yusei breaks under the pressure of silence, of wanting to be anywhere but here, nails digging into the steering wheel.

"It's alright if you want to end this," he starts, staring at the road, forcing himself to keep his walls up, his emotions far away from the surface. Judai's head snaps towards him, and from the corner of his eye, Yusei sees his mouth dropping open. "I... I understand why you'd want to, after I overreacted like that, so—"

"*What!?*" Judai snaps back, making Yusei wince. He softens his voice after that, but it's clear he's astonished, tense, confused. Perhaps a little scared. "Hold on, what— Yusei, I know, I *understand* that what I said wasn't right, that I should have explained myself better or thought about you further before saying it but breaking up, that seems a little *extreme*."

"Is it?" Yusei chokes out, and Judai makes a noise that's rather affirmative. Yusei licks his lips and blinks at the road, forcing himself to continue. "Judai, you... what you did wasn't that bad. You just... you were just doing what you're used to. What's normal between you two. I was the one that overreacted and blew it out of proportion and got upset over nothing—"

"Over *nothing*?" Judai repeats, incredulous. "I'm sorry, I— are you somehow blaming *yourself* for this? Like I didn't fucking, you know, made you feel like shit by low-key flirting with my ex? Like some fucking jackass?"

Yusei's heartbeat is getting faster by the second, his foot heavier on the pedal, but he forces himself to take a deep breath and slow down. It'd be a bad time to get distracted and crash. "You were just making a joke."

Judai makes a strangled noise that screams frustration. "Well, have you thought maybe that joke wasn't actually appropriate, after all? And all the shit I said afterwards too?"

Yusei swallows. "Even then, it was hardly something for me to ignore you over. That wasn't right."

Judai stares at him in silence, but Yusei can't stare back. He's watching the road, and keeping himself under control. Saying what he has to say, to make Judai realize why Yusei isn't worth the risk. Having a boyfriend that stops

talking to you over a joke... that probably isn't fun. Judai should take that into account, as well as all the other shit Yusei hasn't told him—

"Pull over."

"What?" Yusei asks, wondering if he somehow misheard, and risks a look towards Judai to find him staring, like he knew he was, only his expression — his eyes are narrowed, dark and stormy, his jaw clenched tight. There's fire there, anger simmering under the look, but somehow Yusei doesn't feel like he's angry *at him*.

"Pull over, Yusei. Right now." There's no room in his voice for argument, but Yusei opens his mouth anyways, only to snap it shut when Judai talks again, softer, pleading. "Yusei, please. Pull over. If we're fixing this mess, I need you to look at me. Stop driving. You're using the road as a shield, but please— I need you to *look at me*."

Yusei hesitates. They're close to place, Yusei can see the building, and he isn't sure he'd like to see where this is going while parked in a McDonald's, so he hits the gas, ignoring Judai's whispered '*fuck, holy shit*' and drives inside the parking lot of his building without asking, parking the car next to his bike and cutting the engine, staring at his hands clenched over the wheel. The tension builds again, as he's unable to gather out himself together fast enough now, but it's Judai that cracks it first.

"Yusei," Judai says, soft as velvet, sad, dripping from his lips as if he's begging. "Please. If you want to break up with me, that's fine. But I want you to look me in the eye when you say it."

Yusei's breath catches, and his hands drop from the steering wheel to his lap. He stares at them, clenching them together, a thumb running over the tiny scar over the back of his right hand that he got when he first tried to play mechanic, with no tools and no gloves. He breathes in the silence in the car, as suffocating as it is, but his resolve breaks when one of Judai's hands lands over his own, squeezing.

"Yusei, *please*," he says, again, this time more desperate, shaky. "I'm sorry. I'm so fucking sorry, I couldn't even think after that day. I had to go to

parties, meetings, and I was so *lost*. Please, talk to me. Don't close off. *Please*. Be honest. Do you want to break up?"

Yusei tangles his fingers with Judai's, feeling as tears build. He hates it so much, how his tear ducts are getting more use this week than they have in years, outside of nightmares, but he fails at keeping them in, this time, and ignores the few that manage to slip from his eyes, dropping right onto the back of Judai's hand, blinking he blurriness and moistness away

He doesn't know how to do this. He doesn't. Honesty is his only path. "I... don't want to break up. I just— I can't see why you're with me, now."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Judai rushes out the words, and Yusei finally dares to look at him, but it only lasts for a second, since he closes his eyes when Judai's other hand brushes over his cheek, cleaning up his tears. "I love you. Why wouldn't I want to be with you?"

"You don't get it," Yusei whispers, and Judai lets out a grunt. Yusei opens his eyes, meets his hurt, desperate, confused gaze. His own words feel like he's taking a knife to his tongue, making it bleed. "You love him, too. You could have better."

Realization seems to hit Judai like a ton of bricks, his whole body slumping with it— and then the fire from before is back, as his features turn into a scowl.

"No," he snaps, roughly, torn from his throat with the strength of certainty, of knowing exactly what he's talking about. And even then, it breaks down, slowly being crushed by confusion the longer he speaks. "No, I don't. Not like I love you. *Never* like I love you. What I said, that was so fucking *dumb*. I hate myself so much for it, I thought you would actually want to break up over it, because my wording was so off and I didn't even notice, and the face you made— but you're talking about it being your fault and I'm so confused as to why you think that. Yusei, I love you. Please, tell me what's going on in your head right now, because I'm just... You told me I shouldn't think you could do *better*, but now you're pulling this on me, I'm..."

He doesn't finish his sentence, but Yusei can see it in his eyes; he's lost, utterly so, not at all confident about what is going on inside Yusei's head, just guessing and taking shots in the dark, but Yusei's tongue is heavy and unwilling. It hurts, unbelievably so, to look at Judai, to love him this deeply and feel like he's scrambling to keep him by his side. But he wants to try, doesn't he? He doesn't want to lose him. He told himself he would try, that he'd keep Judai as long as he wanted him, but how can he do that, when Judai seems unaware that they're not the same?

"I don't think I'm enough for you, the way you're more than enough for me," Yusei starts, watching Judai's eyes widen. "I'm... I'm not anything, compared to you. To Johan-san. And you deserve someone that shines just like that, that makes everything comfortable— you might want me now, but it doesn't mean you won't realize I'm not what you need."

Judai seems to have been rendered speechless, for once. He stares at Yusei, with those deep brown eyes of his, wide and shocked, looking at him as if he can't believe what he just heard. And then some of the anger comes out.

"Fuck that," he says, from between gritted teeth, and Yusei opens his mouth to protest, but Judai's faster. "No! Fuck that! You heard me? Fuck that. That's some bullshit. I'm not listening to you say that as if you don't mean the world to me—"

"—I'm not trying to invalidate your feelings!—"

"—yes, you are!" Judai takes a deep breath, shaking his head. "I love you! *You!* Do you have *any* idea how hard it was for me to ever say to anyone else before? Did you not listen, when I told you? I know you did, so I don't know why the fuck you're flipping out on me like this—"

Something rises in Yusei's chest, an unexpected feeling, not quite anger—indignation, mixed with sorrow, bitterness. The hurtful thoughts that have been running around his brain slip out, torn from his lips. "Because I'm right! We're not the same, what I want or need is not equal to what you want or need, so you deserve better! Are you going to pretend you're happy having to ways come back here, to me, forever? That's not who you are, we

both know this, it's only a matter of time before you realize I have nothing to offer—"

Judai reels back on his seat like he's been slapped, but he keeps his grip on Yusei's hands. "Nothing to *offer*? So what, you're a store? The fact that you love me doesn't matter, is that it? Is that how little you think I care about you?"

"I'm not saying you don't care, I'm saying you'll get bored of me!" Yusei's own voice is rising, meeting Judai's volume, but he seems to be far too gone to pull back now, words escaping his mouth like a waterfall. "We have very little in common, I don't know you as well as others. There's nothing about me remarkable enough for me to be more than a second choice or a stepping stone—"

"*What!?* How long have you been thinking like this?" Judai demands, squeezing Yusei's hands again, his whole expression screaming disbelief. "How long have you been *feeling* like this?"

"I always knew it would be temporary. I don't have enough to keep you," Yusei closes his eyes, one of his hands escaping from Judai's grip to rub his eyes, a few more years spilling. "I was selfish and greedy, thinking I could have you. Judai, you're so *good*. You're so many things, I wouldn't be able to name them all. You're wonderful. I fell in love with you so fast, it terrified me. It still does, the thought of you leaving and never coming back, but I'm not meant for you. Someone like Johan-san, he's— he's perfect. He's all I'm not. I couldn't understand why you broke up, and now you're still so close, he—"

"—he asked me to marry him."

Yusei's words die in his throat, his tongue going flat, and when he blinks his eyes open, Judai looks on the verge of tears himself, looking off to the side for a few seconds before meeting Yusei's eyes in full once more, spilling over with feeling.

"That's why we broke up. We had been having issues for a while— back then, I wasn't ready to even do something like stay for a month at his place.

I was too restless, and about a year younger than you are right now. He couldn't deal with me wanting to explore the world. He asked me to move in and work in Sweden with him every time I popped in," Judai takes a deep breath, but he doesn't break eye contact, letting Yusei see the pain, the anguish. The memories he didn't want to unearth. "We were always taking breaks from each other. You know I had flings in between him. Rebounds. I'm not proud of it. And the last time we got together, he seemed willing to compromise. But then he, well..."

"He proposed," Yusei mumbles, finishing for him. He honestly has no idea what to think, neither about this information nor about the sudden de-escalation of their argument. He— when Judai talks about Johan-san, he talks about the good. About how kind he is, how selfless, how he makes everyone feel at ease, how he puts a little heart into everything he does. It's not unlike the way Yusei would talk about Aki, if he really thinks about it. And while he knew about the rebounds, he had imagined them fizzling out from each other, instead of, well... going out with a bang, so to speak.

"He proposed," Judai shrugs, licking his lips. "I didn't take it well. I might have thrown the ring out the window. I might have jumped out the window after it just to toss it at his face. I might have said some things I already apologized for. Not my brightest moment."

Despite the seriousness of the moment, Yusei can't help but snort, picturing all too well the image of Judai being so incredibly angry beyond himself that he jumped out a window in order to be petty. The reaction earns him the slightest turn up of Judai's lips, the tiniest smile, and something starts turning in Yusei's brain. Something that allows him to listen better.

"Yusei, if I wanted to be with Johan, or with anyone else, I would be," Judai tilts his head to the side, shrugging once more. "But I don't love him. Not like I love you. I insist, you're different from anything I've ever known. I don't *care* about what you do, what you can *offer*, whatever the fuck that means. I care about who you *are*. I love *you*, not what you can give me."

"Wouldn't you be happier, if I just packed up and went everywhere with you?" The question slips from Yusei's lips, unwarranted, but he finds that he doesn't regret it. He'd like to know. "If we could be together all the time?"

Judai's lips morph into a sad smile. It fits him too well, makes Yusei wonder why he hasn't seen it before. "That's a cruel question. I would love to be with you all the time— do you know how hard it is for me now, to be away? I had to sit at meetings this week, attended three whole parties, and all I could think about is how much I wanted you. My job makes me happy, but it doesn't mean I'd be *happier* if I took you away from everything that makes you *you*. Yusei, this city is *yours*. How could I take you from it? How could I ask you to just give up all your amazing hard work, for what? A few old buildings? Jet lag? Airplane food?"

There's a few seconds of silence, then, as the weight of Judai's words wash over him, like a splash of cold water. Slowly, a few things come into sharp focus; the building heat of the car, because they're still in it and summer is approaching, the tears drying on his cheeks, the stiffness of his shoulders and the quick pace of his heart. It feels like he's actually awake now, after a week of behaving like a zombie and letting his feelings drive him mostly blind, in ways he hasn't allowed them to in years. Looking at Judai's eyes now, their familiar shape and color, the way they draw him in and make him want to spill his insides, Yusei realizes there's no use fighting against himself. There's no use pretending he's alright, when all he has wanted to do all week is sleep and not wake up to a hurtful reality.

And Judai, he... if Yusei were a different kind of person, someone a little less wrecked from top to bottom, he'd probably giggle, in this moment, at the realization that there's no use fighting him, too. Not when he's right.

"I haven't been honest," Yusei admits, his words muted but flowing without his usual reserve, and rubs his eyes again. His vision has gone blurry with tears and he doesn't have his contacts, so he can't see Judai really well, but they keep watering anyway, so he leaves it be. "I've been so stressed, since day one, thinking I've been unfairly keeping you. It gets... it gets tiring, sometimes, to share you with the world, but it's nothing compared to the way I feel about... about myself. Judai, I've been fine for so long, I was alright. And then you came, and I don't know what you did to me— I'm so sorry, too, that I'm making it all a mess, that I'm overreacting, when I should have just calmed down—"

"Yusei. You're *not* overreacting," Judai interrupts, softly, and scoots over as far as he can on his seat, hands coming to hold his cheeks, like he did at the airport. Yusei is immediately relaxing into it, exhausted somewhere deep in his heart, in his bones. "I see how you push yourself. I see how you *neglect* yourself, and I try to make it better any way I can without— without choking you with it. I see how everyone looks at you, expecting you to have the last word, to be strong."

He pauses, and leans in, so close Yusei could attempt to count his eyelashes and fail, so close he can see the pale, sun-given freckles over Judai's cheeks and neck and nose. His voice is soft as a morning kiss, and guides Yusei like a lighthouse, grounds him like a rock.

Yusei's never had anyone being his rock before. Not really. "But you don't have to be like that around me. You can want me, Yusei. You can think of yourself first. You can want me, as we are, or you can... I've said this, but you can want me to stay. You can. Because sometimes I want to stay too. Sometimes I want nothing more."

Yusei closes his eyes and drops his head down onto Judai's left shoulder, and feels him immediately wrapping his arms around him, in a hug that's entirely too uncomfortable but unmeasurably reassuring. They stay like that, twisted and cramped, for a few minutes, as Yusei gathers his words.

"I love you," is what he ends up whispering, hands squeezing Judai's arms around him. "That can't be bad, can it?"

"It isn't," Judai's response comes iron-clad, his voice unwavering, solid. Yusei wants to drown in it. "It isn't. Not for us. It's just... ten months, that's decent time for a normal couple. They get to figure a lot out in a year, but I've barely been in the country for half that time. I haven't been as fair to you as I could be."

Yusei's breath catches in his throat. "I don't want you to do anything you don't want to."

"Oh, baby," Judai sighs, leaning back to get a clear look at Yusei's expression, his eyes twinkling. "I can't believe I'm saying this, but if

compromising means seeing you more often— I can't complain. I want that."

Yusei's heart jumps, and he doesn't resist when Judai pulls him in to lay a kiss against his forehead. For the first time in a week, his heart feels soothed.

Judai orders pizza for lunch, two boxes, claiming he's famished. Yusei takes a second to look at his reflection in the bathroom and isn't at all surprised by Judai's thinly veiled attempt at taking care of him, making sure he eats—he looks terrible, and the tear tracks over his red cheeks don't help, making him feel self-conscious. He splashes water over his skin and changes into sweatpants and a tank top, while Judai makes himself at home on his couch, his jacket off and his shoes abandoned next to Yusei's door, along with his luggage.

Yusei stands under the threshold of his bedroom, watching the back of his head, unsure. The ride up the elevator was quiet, but Judai did not let go of his hand for even a second after they got out of the car. He isn't sure how to behave normally, if he even should, but his heart craves for him to close the distance, and Yusei listens to it for once, settling a respectable distance from Judai on the couch.

"What, are we at church?" Judai asks, as he locks his phone and looks at Yusei, a smile tugging at his lips. He opens his arms in his direction, watching him in silence, but Yusei hesitates, feeling awkward inside his own skin. Judai's smile loses its shine, just a little, and his eyes go soft, compassionate. Meet him in the middle as he scoots over to sit closer, only their knees touching. "Hey, it's cool. We'll figure this out. Baby steps."

Judai extends his hand in invitation, right over Yusei's knee, and this time Yusei doesn't hesitate to take it, nodding. "I just... I don't know how any of this works. How I can make it better."

Judai squeezes his hand, sighing, and brings it up, kissing Yusei's knuckles. "You're not going to make it better. We are. Takes two to tango, and also to suck dick, so I think it's only fair for both of us to put in the work."

“You don’t need to bring up dicks, though,” Yusei mumbles, scrunching up his nose. It’s not funny. It isn’t. He’s not holding back a snort. Not at all. Yusei’s sense of humor is certainly above that. “What does compromising even mean?”

“Well, I’ve never been that good at it. But that’s because, well, I think I’ve only dated extremists, and I’m quite extreme myself— and please don’t tell anyone I said that, thank you,” Judai winces, biting his lip, but his thumb runs soothing motions over the skin of Yusei’s hand. Under any other circumstance, it would be distracting. Right now, it just helps him breathe a little easier. “We just need to find that sweet spot between us. It might mean that we both might have to sacrifice some things in order to be happier together.”

“That... doesn’t sound too bad.”

Judai nods, narrowing his eyes. “I’m the only one that’s making them today, though.”

“Ah,” Yusei pauses, frowning. “What?”

Judai smiles, and it’s on the self-aware side of the spectrum. A smile not quite forced, but certainly not a happy one. “I gotta be honest, Yusei. I was entirely too comfortable pretending you were not being negatively affected in a meaningful way by me going away from long stretches. It’s... it’s not cool.”

Yusei blinks at him in confusion.

“They aren’t that bad. I just miss you a lot, sometimes, and get too in my head about it, when I’m having a below-average day,” Yusei wants to shrug, but Judai’s face turns further into a frown the longer he speaks, so he doesn’t. “You’re not being selfish.”

“Eh, maybe I am, though. Even if it’s just a little. Like I said, ten months, a lot for some people, not much for us, considering I’m not here every single day,” Judai pauses, taking a deep breath. His eyes are serious, in that way that’s a little eye-catching because it makes him look even more handsome,

but Yusei's thinking more about the cogs turning inside his head, trying to follow his logic, because this is behavior Yusei is not used to. Compromising, in order to take weight off his shoulders, or share a weight with someone... that's hardly something he's ever done, at least that he can recall right now. "I thought about a lot of things, during my flight here. About how stupid I am, mostly, sure, but also about how it hurt, even before I fucked up, to not *have you*, you know? It's really fucking hard to be anywhere these days, at least for as long as *three months*. I was going fucking insane with how badly I wanted to get shit over with just to get to you."

Yusei bites the inside of his cheek. His hands are sweaty, by now, out of nerves, but Judai just squeezes the hand in his grip harder, when Yusei tries to pull away to dry them. In defiance, he even brings it up to kiss it again, a little bit of tongue brushing his skin. Gross. "I can't say it hasn't been hard here. It's just..."

Yusei stops himself, not really confident about where his words are going, but Judai raises his eyebrows at him, silently urges him on.

"...it's just, I'm not really used to... being this happy," Yusei's eyes drop to his lap, his cheeks heating. He doesn't see Judai's face turning just as red. "I told myself I had to be happy with the distance because it's better than nothing. When... when I came onto you, I knew I would be happy just having you in any way. I still would be. I don't want you to change yourself for me."

"That's the thing, though," Judai says, his voice airy, and Yusei risks looking up to see his smile back on his lips, brighter than it's been all day. "I'm pretty sure I read somewhere that relationships are an opportunity to grow as a person... or something like that, it could be bullshit, but it sounds legit."

This time, Yusei does snort. "I think I'm too jaded to grow and change like that—"

"Don't," Judai snaps, though not unkindly, shaking his head. "You're not too anything, except too cute. And hot, seriously. I can already see you

denying it, so let me propose something— I come up with a work schedule for the first time in my life, in which I will promise to make enough time to stick around for a month or so, and then work for a month or so, and then rinse and repeat. And *you* will compromise by stopping with being so hard on yourself.”

“That...” Yusei tilts his head. “Seems unbalanced? I’d hardly be doing any changes compared to you—”

“You’ve clearly never tried dealing with your anxiety, have you?” Judai interrupts him with an unimpressed stare, and Yusei has to swallow his tongue, because, well. That is true. The main reason he became a mess this week was because of the anxiety that he refused to work against. “There, I can see you giving me the reason, good, good boy.”

Yusei’s body twitches. “Don’t call me that.”

“Too kinky?” Is Judai’s quip, and Yusei closes his eyes, holding back an amused smile. He doesn’t want to give him the satisfaction. “Aw, come on, I’ve been wanting to see that smile for more than a week now...”

“Is that all, though?” Yusei asks, trying to bring the subject back on track. “That’s it, we just do that?”

“Trial and error, baby,” Judai chuckles, but Yusei can tell he’s serious. He fully intends to see what works and what doesn’t, and Yusei, when he thinks about it, isn’t against that at all. “What I’m personally worried about, though, is... shutting down.”

Yusei winces. “That... I’m really sorry about that, I just didn’t know what to do.”

“That’s alright,” Judai leans in, kisses his forehead, his cheek. “I mean, it’s not cool I guess, because it scared the hell out of me, but I understand how you felt. You were overwhelmed, and tired, and that joke was like, fuck, certainly too much. We just have to work on... talking. That’s a thing we both have to do, too.”

Yusei sighs, scooting a little closer on the couch. Judai brings him in, wraps his arms around his waist, pulls at him until Yusei concedes and climbs over his lap, ignoring the blush blossoming on his cheeks. “You’re better at talking than me.”

“Maybe, but mostly about stupid shit,” Judai buries his face in Yusei’s neck, kissing whatever skin he comes across without hesitation. Yusei closes his eyes and allows himself to enjoy it— he feels so *safe*, like this, he missed it so much he could cry again. Instead, Yusei just clings harder. “I just love you, like, a lot. A lot, a lot. And I don’t want to see us fall apart because we fail at making each other know what we feel, and why. I don’t want that. I don’t want to hurt you, ever, but I think that’s virtually impossible in a relationship, so... We should try our hardest.”

“I’m good at trying,” Yusei mumbles, agreeing with the sentiment. He feels like a ton of bricks have just been taken off his back, and that warm feeling is back. Gone is the cold that plagued him, the pain in his heart, the reassurance of Judai being *here*, of Judai saying he’s sorry, of Judai understanding, of saying he loves him— it’s the best medicine he’s ever taken. “I love you. I’m glad you’re back.”

Judai doesn’t answer, not verbally, but he does use his mouth. His lips find his own as if led by a magnet, and Yusei is suddenly hit with the three months of touch starvation he’s been suffering, his limbs going jelly, his breath escaping his chest as his lips fall open, his tongue seeking out Judai’s lips. Judai hums in response, in a way that yells pleasantly surprised, leaning back against the couch, letting Yusei slide closer until their chests are almost touching, hands making their way to the small of his back. It’s lazy and hot, gets sloppy really fast, his heartbeat accelerating as Judai’s hands drift lower, sneaking under the waistband of his sweatpants, fingertips tickling at his skin and causing shivers down his spine.

It’s their first kiss in three months, and it makes Yusei forget just about everything that’s happened since their last, at the airport. He forgets every tiny doubt, and allows his soul to be bared and wrapped up in the love Judai showers him with, genuine and kind and so strong he’s willing to try anything, do things he hasn’t done before for anyone, just to keep it.

In comes the brush of teeth, over Yusei's bottom lip, making him jump and break away, saliva dripping down his chin, only for him to fall back in within a second, welcoming back the intrusion of Judai's tongue, the abuse of his teeth. He's so into it, it's making his blood rush downwards, his brain absolutely out of the equation— but he doesn't even get to properly moan Judai's name out when his doorbell rings, breaking the spell.

“Pizza,” Judai mumbles out, licking his lips and looking up at Yusei with the biggest, dumbest, most captivated smile he's ever seen. It makes Yusei a little giddy himself, even though they got interrupted by the pizza man. “You get the drinks while I pay, yeah?”

Yusei climbs off Judai's lap with a hum of agreement, and stays sitting on the couch for a few seconds, watching him rush to the door. He looks different from how he did at the airport— like he's also so, so much better like this, knowing things are alright, that they'll work it out, that this is just a small hiccup. Yusei sighs, lovesick and quiet, and looks away from him, trying to calm his heart. Finally, his mind quiets, settling into a cloud of fluff, after a week of incessant panicking. He can't wait to take a nap, to wrap himself in Judai's arms, to feel safe and sound in his bed for the first time in months.

And when it comes, after a meal in which Judai tries to lighten up the mood by recounting some of his trip, a kiss is dropped over his forehead, lingering and soft, Judai's voice shifting to that tone he uses when he thinks Yusei's asleep.

“There's no place like home, huh?” He asks, with the air of a man that's been longing for this for far too long, that's happy to be here and happy to see where it takes him.

Yusei can't help but agree, quietly. There's no place like home.

Notes for the Chapter:

soooft SOFT soft

Author's Note:

i hope you guys enjoyed <3